



**COLLEGE OF MEDICINE**

***Dean for Postgraduate Studies and Research***

Regulation for Degrees of Master of Philosophy (MPhil)  
and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Submitted by the Faculty of Medicine to Senate

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## 1 Glossary

<b>Associate supervisor</b>	a supervisor responsible for specific aspects of a student's PhD program
<b>External supervisor</b>	a qualified supervisor based outside the University who is responsible for scientific direction and management of a student's PhD program including administrative issues engaged where an outside body is associated with the research work
<b>Principal supervisor</b>	a primary supervisor responsible for overall scientific direction and management of a student's PhD program including administrative issues
<b>Supervisor</b>	a qualified member of the university who is responsible for scientific direction and management of a student's PhD program including administrative issues

## **2 Principles**

The degree of Doctor in Philosophy (PhD) is the high-status educational degree in Malawi whereas the degree of Master in Philosophy (MPhil) ranks second to the PhD. The degrees are awarded to scholars who research on the subject they specialize in. These degrees are awarded to scholars for the creation and interpretation of knowledge, which extends the forefront of a discipline, through original research. Students pursuing any of these degrees need a thesis to be presented in a logical and scholarly manner and candidates must be able to convince their examiners that they have fully grasped all the concepts of the particular field of learning within which the subject of their thesis falls. Doctorate degree holders in Malawi, like any other country, will have the qualities needed for employment such as the ability to make informed judgement on intricate issues in specialist fields and innovation in tackling and solving problems.

These Regulations are intended to act as a guide for the supervision of research students and to summarise the procedures relating to the various stages of a candidate's registration including admission, the monitoring of progress and assessment. It is intended that the Regulations should assist the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Research and supervisors to establish and maintain sound quality assurance procedures in relation to all aspects of this research degree activity.

The college recognises the importance of the role fulfilled by the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Research and the Regulations include detailed reference to the responsibilities of the Dean as well as those of the supervisor. It should be noted that the college is committed to ensuring the quality of the student's research experience and as such, it is the responsibility of the candidate's supervisors and the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Research to work towards achieving this aim.

## **3 The Research Environment**

A research culture should be fostered in each department with the aim of promoting and establishing high quality research programs involving both members of staff and students. These research programs in the various departments of the college should be creative, competitive and good enough to attract independent funding from both local and international funding bodies. A successful research environment should include the following features:

- i. clear guidance on supervision arrangements, progress monitoring and review mechanisms, and examination procedures;
- ii. a clear articulation of the research project and possible outcomes, a time framework within which it is anticipated the project will be undertaken, and an agreed understanding of how the desired outcomes, including successful

submission of the thesis, might be achieved. This should be achieved through dialogue between the research student, his/her supervisor(s), appropriate University committees and collaborating organizations.

- iii. adequate access to up-to-date resources, including essential equipment, information technology resources and library facilities;
- iv. the provision of skills training for both research student and supervisor(s);
- v. the provision of a framework for research seminars given by research students and academic peers from both within and outside the University;
- vi. the provision of appropriate student support and welfare services;
- vii. the maintenance of clear and accessible records regarding the progress of the research project;
- viii. where third parties have an interest in the research project (for example, research councils or industrial/commercial organisations), a clear understanding of the specific requirements relating to any such association and any implications for intellectual property rights.

#### **4 Admissions and the Enrolment Process**

##### **4.1 Recruitment**

Departments should ensure that prospective research students have access to the following detailed information either through advertisements on graduate research opportunities, or through departmental literature, or when they are promoting a specific, funded research award:

- i. the broad academic area within which the research activity may be undertaken and, where appropriate, a more detailed project description and the name(s) of the proposed supervisor(s);
- ii. the personal, professional and educational experience and qualifications required for admission;
- iii. the time normally required for completion of the research degree;
- iv. the resources, including supervision, which the College will make available to research students;
- v. the fees payable by the prospective students, or that which would be paid on their behalf by a sponsor such as a research council or industrial/commercial partner;
- vi. where appropriate, the type and likely monetary value of any research award, and any restrictions or conditions attached to such an award. Where agencies external to the University might be involved in providing funding or other assistance, the department should clearly indicate whether or not monetary or other assistance has actually been secured;



- vii. the administrative stages which are involved in the research project following acceptance e.g. the expected time-scales for all modes of study;
- viii. the departmental contact point for further information.

## **4.2 Application**

Applications must be submitted in triplicate on the official application forms (Appendix A), which are obtainable from the College Registrar and returned to the University Registrar including official academic transcripts and copies of certificates and references.

The Registrar shall retain one copy of the application documents and send the remaining two to the Postgraduate Studies Coordinator and another to the appropriate Head of Department.

## **4.3 Selection**

### **4.3.1 Staff involved in selection process**

The Departmental Postgraduate Committee including the Postgraduate Studies Coordinator and the proposed supervisor will be involved in the decision-making process with regard to the acceptability of an applicant for the degree of PhD. If the application is deemed to be satisfactory, the committee shall make a recommendation to the Postgraduate Committee through the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Research.

### **4.3.2 Equality of opportunity**

In considering applications from individuals wishing to undertake postgraduate research activity, departments should consider the need for equality of opportunity.

### **4.3.3 Direct contact with the candidate**

- Wherever practical those involved in the selection process should seek to have direct contact with applicants in order to assess their suitability to undertake the proposed research activity.
- If the candidate is unable to visit the College the decision-making team reviewing the candidate's application should discuss the application with the candidate by telephone. This can be of assistance, where appropriate, in assessing the applicant's proficiency in English Language.
- The procedure outlined above should also provide an opportunity for the candidate to assess the ability of the College to provide appropriate supervision, training and resources within the area proposed.

#### **4.3.4 Additional Costs**

Where a candidate is required to undertake a period of preliminary training prior to registration for the degree, or to attend a course in English language, it is important to ensure that the candidate and his/her sponsor are fully aware of the additional costs which will be incurred as a result of any such requirement.

The total amount of this additional fee should be covered by the applicant or his/her sponsor. No arrangements should be made for charging an additional fee after the registration of the student has been completed.

#### **4.3.5 Special needs**

Where an application is received from a candidate with special needs the Registrar's Office should be consulted as to whether effective support can be provided at an institutional level for the individual concerned. It will also be necessary to consider whether there exist any particular requirements with regard to the proposed research project which should be taken into account in relation to the special needs of the individual concerned.

#### **4.3.6 Points to take into account when considering an application: the candidate**

In considering whether or not to accept an applicant the members of staff responsible for taking the decision should take into account the following:

- The office of the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Research (DPGS) will consider if the candidate is appropriately qualified for the proposed subject of study. The candidate's academic qualifications, including English Language proficiency, if necessary, will be checked by the office and the supervisor(s).
- Candidates with a Masters Degree from a recognized university will be considered for registration into a doctoral programme
- Applicants with a medical degree or its equivalent, or appropriate Honours degree in the First or Upper Second Division in a relevant discipline may also be considered for registration into a doctoral programme
- Regardless of previous qualification and experience, all candidates will initially be registered as MPhil candidates with the status only considered for upgrade to PhD status after well proven satisfactory performance by the candidate during the first year of their study.

- 'Candidates may clearly specify from the onset of their studies that they intend to pursue an MPhil programme rather than a PhD programme'
- Each candidate will be required to make arrangement to ensure that adequate academic references been received are submitted in support of the application.
- The office will also consider if the candidate has the ability to fulfill the objectives of the advertised research degree programme and to complete it within the time designated. The candidate's ability in this respect can, where appropriate, be assessed by means of an outline research proposal, by interview or by considering references. This process will involve an exploration of the candidate's ability:
  1. to understand academic concepts relating to the proposed area of research
  2. to achieve demanding objectives consistently;
  3. for independent thought and learning;
  4. to cope with the demands of organising and producing substantial amounts of written material

#### **4.3.7 Points to be considered when reviewing an application from an external candidate**

Registration for a higher degree by research on an external basis is a challenging process both for the student and also the principal and external supervisors. In these circumstances it is essential that any such application is considered very carefully and that all relevant factors, as outlined below, are taken into account.

- The possibility, in accordance with normal requirements, to appoint an external supervisor with comparable research experience to that required of a University supervisor who may, in consultation with the principal supervisor, undertake the detailed supervision of the candidate's research
- Maintaining regular contact, either by e-mail or phone with the University supervisor. This will include meeting with the University supervisor at least once every four months unless an alternative arrangement (normally a minimum of one extended visit to the University per annum) is approved by the Postgraduate Committee.
- Availability of adequate funds to ensure that the student is able to visit the University or to enable the supervisor to visit the student.

#### **4.3.8 Points to be considered when reviewing the proposed project for each application**

- Possibility of requirement of additional capital resources. If additional or other resources are required it is important that appropriate steps are taken to secure these in time for commencement of the programme
- The feasibility of the subject of study being completed within the prescribed time-scale
- Availability of an appropriate programme of training and guidance in research methods be for the candidate

#### **4.3.9 Points to be considered when reviewing the proposed supervisor(s) for each application**

- The office the DPGS should check if the overall workload of the supervisor will enable him/her to undertake satisfactorily all supervisory responsibilities. The Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Research may consult the Dean of Faculty and/or Heads of departments to assess the workload of the proposed supervisor(s) to ensure that the quality of supervision will not be put at risk.
- The office should also confirm if the member of staff identified to be the supervisor has previously acted as principal supervisor. It is important that the principal supervisor has appropriate supervisory experience up to and including submission and assessment of the thesis.
- The College requires each student to have more than one supervisor and should therefore ensure that each application includes an associate supervisor. (A new member of staff on probation would, in any event, normally be appointed in the first instance as associate supervisor).
- There should be a reasonable expectation on the part of the student that proper supervision will be provided throughout the research programme. Therefore, for the sake of continuity of supervision, in the case where one or both supervisors might be on sabbatical leave, secondment or a limited tenure of contract, appropriate arrangement should be made

#### **4.3.10 Checks carried out by registry**

The following checks will be carried out on a formal basis by the Registrar's Office. It is advisable, however, that the Dean of Postgraduate

Studies and Research through the Postgraduate Studies Coordinator should be aware of the requirements which exist in this connection:

- Each candidate must provide documentary evidence confirming funds in respect of tuition fees and maintenance
- the candidate's entry qualifications, including English language, will be confirmed to be of an acceptable level

#### **4.3.11 Information for the candidate**

For the prospective research student it is important that the selection process should provide an opportunity to clarify key issues relating to the research programme. These will include financial arrangements, supervision arrangements, the facilities which will be made available to support the research project, the opportunities that might exist to undertake teaching and demonstrating duties, and student welfare matters. If it is proposed to nominate the candidate for a studentship, the eligibility requirements and conditions attaching to any such award should be made clear.

#### **4.3.12 Reasons for decisions**

Upon completion of the selection process those responsible for the admission of research students in the department concerned are required to record the reasons for decisions taken with regard to individual applications. Departments are advised, where appropriate and practicable, to provide constructive feedback for unsuccessful candidates.

#### **4.3.13 Timescale for decision-making**

Decisions on applications should normally be taken within two months of receipt of a detailed application from a candidate.

#### **4.3.14 Approval by the Postgraduate Committee**

When a candidate's application has been accepted by the Departmental Postgraduate Committee a recommendation is put to the College Postgraduate Committee so that the student can be formally registered. This process should normally be a formality unless, for example, the candidate's entry qualifications are non-standard in which case it will be necessary for more detailed consideration to be given to the matter. A letter from the Chairman of the Postgraduate Committee will be forwarded to the University Registrars Office outlining various aspects of their registration including any conditions which may be attached to the acceptance for endorsement by University Senate. The student shall initially be registered as a Masters in Philosophy (MPhil) student for the

first year. On successful completion of the first year, the student's registration shall be converted to a status of PhD by research.

#### **4.4 Appointment of supervisors**

##### **4.4.1 The Supervisory Team**

Current guidance underlines the requirement for a student to have more than one supervisor. It is therefore a requirement that arrangements are made for the appointment of an associate supervisor. For many existing students such an arrangement will already be in place, reflecting the diverse nature of the research project or the requirement for a new supervisor to be supported by a more experienced supervisor. A new member of staff on probation would normally be appointed as an associate supervisor in the first instance.

It is essential that one member of the supervisory team who is a member of staff of the University is appointed as the **Principal Supervisor**. S/he will take full responsibility for the overall direction and management of the research programme and also for administrative matters relating to the student's registration including issues relating to progress.

It is a requirement that an **Associate Supervisor** is appointed who will normally be a member of staff of the University and who will contribute their specific expertise in assisting the principal supervisor throughout the development of the student's research programme. The associate supervisor may act as a supervisor of work in progress in consultation with the principal supervisor. It is possible that an additional associate supervisor may be appointed during the student's research programme in order to reflect particular input which may be required as the project develops.

It is a University requirement that supervisors have the following attributes:

- 1. A degree in Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) from a recognised university**
- 2. Previous experience in research proven by a track record number of publications in peer-reviewed journals**
- 3. Be actively engaged in conducting clinical research**
- 4. Previous experience of supervising a PhD student (essential for Principal Supervisor)**

The division of responsibilities between Principal and Associate supervisor will depend upon the actual context and expertise of the supervisors and this should be reflected in their workload allocations. For example, where an experienced supervisor is acting as mentor to an inexperienced supervisor, there is an expectation that there will be joint supervision in

the sense that both supervisors are fully involved at all stages (i.e. a 50%:50% split). When the second supervisor is simply there as back-up in the eventuality of the first supervisor leaving the University or being taken ill or going on a sabbatical leave, the split is can be 90%:10%. Other divisions may be appropriate, including a 70%-to-30% split, and these may vary from one year to another.

In addition to the above it is expected that **other academic colleagues**, both within and outside the University, can be invited to contribute to the research on a collegiate basis. This situation is generally recognised by the student through an acknowledgement in the thesis.

Where an outside body is associated with the work an **External Supervisor** may be appointed for an internal student. In such circumstances the external supervisor fulfils the role of providing a critical commentary on the programme of work completed, based on periodical reviews presented by the student either in meetings with the principal supervisor or in report form. The external supervisor may also facilitate access to equipment or data resources otherwise inaccessible to the student.

For external students, the **External Supervisor** in addition takes responsibility for the day-to-day supervision of research work in progress. The External Supervisor is expected to have comparable qualifications to that required of a University supervisor. In such circumstances it is the responsibility of the external supervisor to ensure that the thesis presented represents the candidate's own personal contribution and that any other contributions are clearly delineated. Where an external supervisor is appointed there must also be a principal supervisor from within the University.

It is essential that the supervisors meet as a **Supervisory Team**, including, where practicable, the external supervisor, with the student at regular intervals throughout the research programme. Such meetings should be held once or more per year and may be additional to the regular meetings held between the student and the principal supervisor and/or other members of the Supervisory Team. It is considered essential good practice that an accurate record of all supervisory meetings be shared with all members of the Supervisory Team. One method of achieving this is for the student to prepare a summary of each meeting provided this does not inhibit their contribution to the discussion. After any corrections have been made as necessary by the principal supervisor or supervisor involved, the summary can be circulated to other members of the Supervisory Team. An accurate and permanent record of all such meetings can thus be maintained. This process of managing the links between the student and other members of the Team will also address

the situation which can arise where a student may receive potentially conflicting advice from the supervisors. The aim of the Supervisory Team is to achieve maximum clarity in the supervisory process, thereby ensuring that the student's needs are addressed throughout the research programme.

If one of the candidate's internal supervisors leaves the University, whether on a temporary or permanent basis, it is essential that they inform the Director of Postgraduate Research accordingly. In such circumstances the Director should make appropriate arrangements to ensure continuation of supervision.

#### **4.4.2 Appointment of a member of staff as a supervisor for the first time**

Breadth of experience and knowledge across the Supervisory Team will mean that the student always has access to someone with experience of supporting research student(s) all the way to the time of completing their programme successfully. It is, therefore, essential that either the Principal Supervisor or one of the Associate Supervisors should have appropriate supervisory experience up to and including successful submission and assessment of a thesis. New and established supervisors will be encouraged to attend appropriate training in research supervision.

#### **4.4.3 Maximum number of students to be supervised by a single member of staff**

The maximum number of students which may be supervised by a member of staff is 8 FTE. In this context a student supervised as principal supervisor, whether full-time, part-time or writing-up, counts as one. Where a member of staff is acting as an associate supervisor each such student counts as half. Where a member of staff is supervising up to the maximum number of students permitted it is expected that, as far as possible, there will be a reasonable spread of candidates from first year to "writing-up" status.

### **4.5 Enrolment as a student of the College**

Having been accepted by the Postgraduate Committee as a candidate for a PhD by research it will be necessary when each individual commences their studies for them to enroll as a student of the College. Most research students may enroll at the beginning of the academic year in late December/January although it is possible to do so with effect from 1 April or 1 July or 1 October subject to the agreement of the department. If any candidate arrives at a date other than those detailed above they may, with the agreement of the department concerned, be permitted to enroll as a student of the College and commence work on their research on the following basis:

- i. arrival up to one month after 1 January, enrolment backdated to 1 January



- ii. arrival during February/March enrolment to take effect from 1 April

A similar approach will apply in relation to arrival at other times during the year.

#### **4.6 Enrolment of international students**

Members of staff who are responsible for the supervision of international research students should be aware of the following guidelines:

- i. Those responsible for the admission of research students and the proposed principal supervisor must ensure that applicants have a good proficiency in the English language.
- ii. Overseas sponsoring authorities may seek detailed discussion with the College particularly at the start of a student's programme. Initial discussions should cover any preliminary courses the student may need to take, the probable length of the research programme, tuition fees to be charged including writing-up fees, any additional expenses which might be incurred and the nature and frequency of reports on the student's progress required by the sponsoring authority.
- iii. In the event of a candidate being required to undertake a period of preliminary training in order to register for the degree, any resulting increase in the overall length and cost of the programme should be made clear both to the student and to the sponsoring body prior to registration.
- iv. Where a student is sponsored it is the responsibility of the department concerned to provide a report on the progress of the student to the sponsoring authority usually once per year. The College's annual progress report may be used as appropriate to form the basis for this report. Supervisors should be aware of the importance placed by sponsoring authorities on such reports and should be realistic in their assessment of the time likely to be required by students to complete their research programmes. For their part students should be encouraged to draw any problems to the attention of the supervisor, Head of departmental or the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Research as soon as these occur in order that enquiries can be made and any issues rectified.
- v. Sponsoring authorities should be informed at the earliest possible opportunity of changes in a programme agreed, during the course of the research project, with the student and of any implications that these may have for the length of the research.
- vi. An international student's perception of the nature of supervision may be influenced by their cultural background. International graduates may, for example, be accustomed to a more structured approach to training/supervision with limited scope for initiative. It should, therefore, be borne in mind that some international students may need a different kind of supervision and more guidance than others, particularly in the early stages of their course.

## **5 The Early Stages**

### **5.1 Induction**

The College should provide an induction programme designed to assist in ensuring that students commence their studies with an appropriate understanding of both the academic and social environment in which they will be working.

Additionally, supervisors should provide an induction programme relating to the student's research area, to include training in specific research methods and advice on background reading to assist in initial research activity. Students should also receive, as part of the induction process, information with regard to health and safety and any other requirements which might exist in relation to working practices in laboratories.

### **5.2 Initial discussion between student and supervisor**

At the commencement of the proposed programme of work the Supervisorial Team is required to hold a full discussion with the student. The details of this project meeting should be recorded either by the principal supervisor or the student and an agreed copy be retained by both parties. (See 7.3.3 below with regard to the recording of meetings). The discussion should normally cover:

#### **5.2.1 The scope of the project**

the aims and objectives of the proposed programme of work and an initial definition of the subject of study.

#### **5.2.2 The management of the project**

- the overall timetable for the planning and completion of the programme of work including any programme of training and guidance in research methods, any period of preliminary reading, fieldwork (as appropriate), analysis and interpretation of results and writing-up.
- the development, jointly with each student, of a 'Training Needs Analysis' (see 6.2.3 below)
- the importance of completing the programme according to plan in the time available
- any constraints, other than time, which may affect the programme of work, such as materials or other costs and the need to design and build equipment.
- an agreed and clearly defined programme of regular meetings between the supervisor(s) and the student to monitor progress of the research and, as appropriate, to review the details of the overall timetable for the programme of work. It is expected that

more frequent meetings would be held in the first few weeks. (See also 7.3.2 below regarding the frequency of meetings)

### **5.2.3 Guidance**

- the standard of work expected (students should be referred to successful theses in the Library for guidance as to what is expected of them)
- guidance about the use of literature, and other sources of information including the availability of expertise from other members of staff, and about attendance at appropriate training courses and meetings of learned societies.
- appropriate guidance to enable the student to fully appreciate the importance of avoiding plagiarism or the fabrication of research results.
- good practice in relation to the recording, storage and retention of research data including any specific points related to the use of log books and the electronic storage of data including the retention of hard copies of all documents.
- procedures for the submission of written work and/or the presentation of internal reports while the research is in progress.
- the possibility of presenting work at external meetings and submitting it for publication.
- ways in which the new student can be put in contact with other research students where areas of research overlap in the department, in other departments or, for example, in the Postgraduate Fora of the College. The identity of, and an introduction to, other members of staff who may be associated with the area of research.
- an overview of the role and responsibilities of the supervisors appointed and also information regarding the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Research and the responsibilities normally associated with the latter position.

### **5.3 Responsibilities of the student**

The supervisor should be aware of the student's responsibilities, which include the following:

- i. accepting ultimate responsibility for his/her own research activity and candidacy for a degree;

- ii. discussing and agreeing with the supervisor the appropriate type and extent of guidance and feedback and agreeing a schedule of meetings;
- iii. taking the initiative in raising any problems or difficulties, however small they may seem, for discussion with the supervisor(s);
- iv. ensuring that reasonable efforts are made to maintain satisfactory progress, at all times, with respect to the research project and any programme of work agreed with the supervisor(s);
- v. identifying his/her own development and training needs and communicating these to the supervisor and making appropriate use of teaching and learning facilities provided by the University or any third party;
- vi. developing responsibility for the direction of and innovation in the research project as it progresses;
- vii. submitting written work at specified and agreed times for review by the supervisor(s);
- viii. agreeing with the supervisor a method of recording the outcome of meetings held between the student and supervisor;
- ix. providing adequate explanation of any failure to attend meetings or to meet other commitments, so that appropriate guidance may be offered;
- x. developing, in consultation with the supervisor, an agreed schedule for progressing and submitting the thesis in a timely manner. It is of crucial importance that students recognise their responsibility in ensuring that the thesis is submitted within the prescribed time period;
- xi. ensuring that s/he is familiar with relevant aspects of the health and safety framework and College guidelines and the regulations of any other interested party;
- xii. preparing periodic progress reports on the research project as may be required by external agencies.
- xiii. preparing a brief, formal report each year for the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Research, through the supervisor, as part of the College's annual progress report procedures .
- xiv. establishing agreement with the supervisor as to the communication of research outputs (see also section 8.1 below);
- xv. communicating to others in the academic community, both orally and in writing, his/her research findings;
- xvi. ensuring that the College's requirements with regard to intellectual property rights are respected in full in relation to output from the research programme, both during the student's registration and subsequently;

- xvii. ensuring that any circumstances which might require the mode of study to be modified (e.g. transfer to writing-up status) or the College registration to be extended, suspended or withdrawn, are brought to the attention of his/her supervisor(s);
- xviii. obtaining the agreement of all authors (including members of the Supervisory Team, as appropriate) to any publication of work contained in the thesis, to protect against improper duplication of publication and/or publication in a form not agreed to by one of the authors.
- xix. informing the supervisor of any communications from the sponsoring or other external body in relation to the research project;
- xx. deciding when to submit the thesis taking due account of the principal supervisor's opinion and advice and in accordance with the agreed timetable;
- xxi. acting as a responsible member of the College's academic community.

## **6 Research Support**

### **6.1 Facilities available to research students**

The facilities made available to research students will inevitably vary from one department to another depending on a number of factors, including the nature of the research undertaken. Departments are encouraged to provide appropriate information for research students on the facilities which will be available to them.

Facilities provided to research students should normally include the following (for certain items it may be necessary for a charge to be made to the student):

- i. library resources, including use of the Inter-library loans system and access to internet-based and CD-ROM databases;
- ii. access to relevant information technology resources, including word processing facilities, spreadsheet packages, statistical and graphics packages, electronic mail and access to the Internet;
- iii. working space with a desk and associated storage facilities, preferably within the student's immediate work environment;
- iv. where appropriate to the research project, access to laboratory facilities, laboratory consumables, scientific instrumentation and photographic services commensurate with the nature and possible scope of the research;
- v. photocopying facilities and, where directly relevant to the research project, appropriate access to internal and external telephone networks. The department should make arrangements to ensure that research students are provided with appropriate training to enable them to use such facilities effectively. If it is departmental policy to charge students for using any of these facilities, in full or in

part, this should be clearly stated in the information made available by the department to research students prior to registration.

## **6.2 Skills training for research students**

### **6.2.1 Postgraduate Research Training**

The College is committed to the principle that all research students should have the opportunity to attend an appropriate programme of training in research-related and personal skills during their research programme. There are some expected core competencies that a student is expected to attain which include: critical appraisal of literature, understand and apply study design concepts, presentation skills etc. These may be attained by attending a number of modular courses provided by the Division of Community Health, Research Support Centre and various research affiliates of the College. Such courses include:

- Good clinical practices (GCP) or Good Laboratory Practices (GLP) (5 credit points)
- Personal Development Program (PDP) (5 credit points)
- Poster presentation (2 credit points)
- Oral presentation at a national or international research conference (2 credit points)

Full details of the available courses may be obtained from the Office of the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Research. Students with approval of their supervisors are also encouraged to attend national and international courses, meetings or workshops. Appropriate credit towards their Postgraduate Research Training Record may be claimed.

One credit represents 10 notional hours of learning. As a guideline the number of credits to be attained in the first year should be a minimum of 10.

It is important that, in addition to the above, individual schools/departments recognize the contributions which they are required to make in providing training for students in their own areas of study. Supervisors have a responsibility to ensure that students are introduced to relevant research methodologies and literature. It is particularly important to make an assessment of any specific academic needs which may arise and to design appropriate programmes of training to meet these needs.

### 6.2.2 Postgraduate Research Training Record (PGRTR)

A set of training record sheets have been designed for students and are available from the Office of the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Research. These are intended to serve as the basis for recording all training received by students in each year of their research programme.

### 6.2.3 Training Needs Analysis

Following best practice in the sector, Supervisors are encouraged to develop jointly with each research student a "Training Needs Analysis", to record this on the PGRTR and to review the outcomes periodically in establishing the training needs for each year of study.

## 7 The Supervisory Process

### 7.1 Responsibilities of the Postgraduate Studies Coordinator

The Postgraduate Studies Coordinator is appointed to work in the Office of the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Research. This person is responsible for the management of all matters relating to the acceptance, progress and assessment of research students in the area concerned. These responsibilities include the following:

#### 7.1.1 Admission and Induction

- Confirming on behalf of the department that the candidate is acceptable in terms of qualifications and ability and that appropriate arrangements have been put forward in relation to supervision
- In the case of an external candidate, checking that the physical conditions relating to the registration are acceptable and that, where feasible, an external supervisor with the requisite experience has been identified. In addition, ensuring that arrangements are established so that adequate contact may be maintained between the student and the internal principal supervisor.
- Ensuring that all other procedures relating to the selection and acceptance of candidates have been followed as outlined in **Error! Reference source not found.****Error! Reference source not found.****Error! Reference source not found.**
- Making appropriate arrangements to ensure that new research students and supervisors are aware of Postgraduate Training Courses and encouraging students to attend such courses.

### **7.1.2 Progression**

- Co-ordinating all departmental procedures in connection with the monitoring of research students including the annual progress review, completion of progress report forms.
- Maintaining a record of research students and of appropriate information relating to their progression.
- Monitoring the submission rates of research students, particularly in relation to the required maximum four-year completion rates for full-time students, and taking action as appropriate in order to ensure submission within the specified period.
- Ensuring that if a member of staff is unavailable to act in a supervisory capacity, whether on a temporary or permanent basis, adequate alternative arrangements for supervision are established and maintained.
- Ensuring that arrangements are made for students to have an opportunity to comment on any aspect of their research programme, in the absence of the supervisor, as part of the annual review process.

### **7.1.3 Feedback from students**

- Ensuring that all research students are given the opportunity to provide feedback on academic provision and support facilities. Departmental Staff-Student forums may in many instances enable research students to comment on such matters. Representation should be properly organised to ensure that this input is focused effectively. Feedback should also be facilitated through the Postgraduate Forum based in the Office of the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Research.

### **7.1.4 Dealing with problems**

- Providing objective support for supervisors where serious concerns regarding a student's ability or application to the research programme have been identified.
- Arranging for an exit interview to be conducted where a student withdraws from the College prior to completion of the research project. This may not always be feasible on a face to face basis and could be by telephone or by arranging for the student to complete a form. Hopefully this process will enable the College to identify any particular factors he student's withdrawal and which should be taken into account in future.



- Providing an independent route for research students who wish to seek advice on any difficulty relating to the supervisory process or who are in need of pastoral care. Where the Postgraduate Studies Coordinator is acting as supervisor the Head of Department should act in this capacity, unless the Postgraduate Studies Coordinator is the Head of Department, in which case another senior member should be appointed to act in this capacity and the student informed of this arrangement at the start of his/her programme.

#### **7.1.5 Assessment**

- Considering proposals put forward by the supervisor(s) for the appointment of Internal and External Examiners and submitting all such recommendations to the Postgraduate Committee.
- Ensuring that procedures relating to the examination of PhD candidates are followed in a proper manner in accordance with the College and University ordinances and regulations.
- Providing assistance and advice as appropriate with regard to any candidate who wishes to submit an appeal in accordance with University regulations concerning any aspect of their academic assessment..

#### **7.1.6 Equal Opportunities**

- Being fully aware of the College's Equal Opportunities Policy in relation to the admission, supervision and assessment of research students.

#### **7.1.7 Support and Training**

- Being familiar with the various guidelines provided for research supervisors and students and ensuring their awareness of the opportunities which exist within the College for training and personal development in research-related matters.

### **7.2 Responsibilities of the supervisor(s)**

There are many different approaches to supervision and each may be valid in different contexts. Such variety is both essential and inevitable, due to the very individual and personal nature of the student/supervisor relationship. Problems encountered during research degrees can often be traced back to a breakdown in communications between student and supervisor(s), sometimes caused by the different expectations each may have of the other. For these reasons, it is essential that a clear definition of their respective roles and responsibilities be agreed before the research starts.

The following indicators of good practice may be implemented in a variety of ways:

- i. **Involvement:** the supervisor(s) can encourage and stimulate the student by referring to his/her own research experiences, and by discussing philosophical as well as technical issues;
- ii. **Encouragement:** research students can become discouraged when facing difficult issues, and a combination of the academic and pastoral role of the supervisor(s) can help in identifying and rectifying any difficulties of this kind at an early stage;
- iii. **Participation:** in general research students should feel part of a larger team, not isolated; the supervisor(s) can help to achieve this by encouraging links with the student to other research work and researchers, not necessarily in the same area of research;
- iv. **Constructive criticism:** the provision of constructive criticism is central to the role of the supervisor(s). An over-sympathetic or uncritical approach can be counter-productive;
- v. **Critical approach:** students should be actively encouraged critically to question existing literature, the assumptions of the research project and the results s/he obtains;
- vi. **Ownership:** students should be encouraged to develop ownership of the research project as it progresses at all stages through to completion.

The responsibilities of the supervisor(s) include:

### 7.2.1 Academic

- possessing and maintaining sufficient knowledge of the research area to provide accurate guidance and advice on the project;
- developing and maintaining the appropriate skills to facilitate the production of high quality research work by the student;
- reading written work produced by the student and providing constructive criticism in a timely fashion;
- ensuring that students are advised at an early stage in their registration of the essential need to avoid conduct amounting to the fabrication of research results or plagiarism;
- taking an active role in introducing the student to other workers in the field, and to the appropriate academic bodies and societies;
- ensuring that appropriate agreement has been obtained with all parties, including external sponsors, in relation to the communication of research outputs;
- advising as to when the thesis should be considered ready for submission;

### **7.2.2 Administrative**

- being accountable to the Postgraduate Committee for the satisfactory progress of the research project;
- putting forward any proposals to the Postgraduate Committee for variations to the student's conditions for research registration; these may include the suspension or extension of a student's registration;
- ensuring that, where appropriate, Ethical Committee approval has been obtained for specific aspects of the research programme;
- ensuring that his/her duties are fulfilled with regard to any formal requirements on the part of external bodies or agencies in relation to the submission of reports, observation of confidentiality, training etc;
- liaising in a timely manner with the Postgraduate Studies Coordinator with regard to arrangements for annual review and examination of the thesis.

### **7.2.3 Organisational**

- developing with the student an appropriate planning schedule for successive stages of the research project (including writing-up) so that the thesis may be completed and submitted by the target date (see 10.1 below).
- developing a jointly agreed 'Training Needs Analysis'
- emphasising to the student the importance of keeping clear, accurate, detailed and accessible records of work undertaken;
- making sufficient time available to fulfill the needs of each individual research student s/he is supervising.

### **7.2.4 Pastoral**

- maintaining regular contact with the student, and being accessible at reasonable times for consultation;
- ensuring that the student is made aware of any unsatisfactory progress or standard of work, and arranging any supportive action as necessary;
- exercising his/her formal duties in terms of University guidelines for health and safety matters;
- providing guidance, encouragement and counsel regarding the future career plans of the research student.

### **7.2.5 Training/Presentational Skills**

- identifying the training needs of the student; assisting and encouraging the student to select appropriate courses and other opportunities for training as part of their personal development;
- ensuring that students, subject to the availability of finance, have an adequate opportunity to present their research work as appropriate at seminars and other meetings, both within and outside the University.

### **7.2.6 Publications**

- encouraging and facilitating the publication of papers, in partnership with students and others who have contributed to the work;
- Each candidate will be required to publish a minimum of three (3) peer-reviewed papers in internationally recognized journals during the time of their research PhD programme in order to be awarded the doctoral degree
- obtaining the agreement of the student for any publication of work contained in the thesis and the inclusion of the student as a co-author;
- ensuring that the student is aware of all issues regarding intellectual property rights relating to the research.

## **7.3 Supervising and monitoring the progress of research students**

### **7.3.1 Monitoring stages**

- i. The supervisor(s) should carefully and regularly monitor the student's work and ensure that the student is made aware as to whether progress and standards of work, including written or oral presentations, are meeting expected levels. As part of this activity, a formal assessment of progress should be undertaken at the end of each year of study.
- ii. The supervisor(s) and student should draft a planning schedule with indicative deadlines and milestones for the completion of distinct stages of the research programme and the completion of written work, to include such reports as may be required as part of the registration, annual review and examination processes of the College.
- iii. In monitoring progress the supervisor(s) should analyse and assess the student's progress in the programme of research against the objectives set out in the original plan of work.

- iv. All principal supervisors are required to submit an annual report on the progress of each research student (through the Postgraduate Studies Coordinator) to the Postgraduate Committee. These reports are to be provided on a standard report form and will recommend whether or not the student should be permitted to continue. In the case of external candidates, additional information shall be provided regarding the number of meetings held each year between student and supervisor. The reports include provision for comment by the student, who receives a copy when finalised. Reports are required for each year that a student is registered for the degree, including the writing-up stage.
- v. As part of the annual review process students should be given the opportunity to comment, in the absence of their supervisor, to the Postgraduate Studies Coordinator (or his/her alternate) on any aspect of their registration for a PhD by research. In this context students should be invited to comment with regard to the supervisory arrangements currently in place.
- vi. A key element in the monitoring process is that when problems arise, corrective action is clearly identified and full guidance and assistance are given to the student. Where alteration to the original plan of work is necessary, this should be fully discussed and agreed, and approval sought as appropriate.

### **7.3.2 Frequency and scheduling of meetings**

- i. The supervisor(s) has a responsibility to provide regular and frequent support for the research student, including face to face meetings, informal meetings, e-mail and telephone contact. As a minimum a research student can expect to have on average the equivalent of 4 hours' support per month with their supervisor(s) whilst registered on a full-time internal basis. The extent of support is likely to be high during the initial stages of the programme when design and preparation work are being undertaken and will vary subsequently. A research student can likewise expect, as a minimum, the equivalent of 1 hour's support per month with their supervisor(s) when they have transferred to writing-up status.
- ii. An outline meetings plan, subject to revision as appropriate, should be produced. This plan should also be linked-up with the schedule of monitoring stages. Where internal or external collaborative partners are involved with the research, then representatives should attend from time to time.

- iii. Meetings should be arranged so that they are as free from interruption as is practicable.
- iv. The supervisor(s) should be accessible to the research student at reasonable times; however informal day-to-day contact should not be a substitute for the scheduled meetings.

### 7.3.3 Agendas of scheduled meetings

- i. The focus of scheduled meetings should be based on key progression points and the professional development of the student and should be complemented by the process of supervision through informal contact.
- ii. The College requires that such meetings should be recorded and the outcomes summarized in a brief formal note, agreed between the supervisor(s) and student. It is recommended as good practice that the student write this record, provided this does not inhibit his/her contribution to the discussion. The record should include a summary of progress to date (referenced as appropriate to the previously agreed plan of work), actions required, and agreed targets for the next phase of work. The formal record should be short, clear and concise.
- iii. The actual agenda of a scheduled meeting will be dictated by the stage reached in the programme of research and the progress made.
- iv. The following issues may serve as items for the agenda of such meetings:
  - *planning and strategic thinking*: during the early stages of the research, the supervisor(s) may well be the principal source of plans for the programme, but beyond that stage the student should be encouraged to display clear forward thinking and to plan an implementation strategy;
  - *generation of ideas*: the student should be encouraged to produce his/her own ideas from the outset, but by the end of the first year of study s/he should be generating original and viable ideas and hypotheses, and should be able to argue them cogently;
  - *evaluation of work in progress*: the analysis and interpretation of results and identification of further objectives for research;
  - *other relevant research*: the supervisor(s) should ensure that the student develops an awareness of the current literature and debate in the field of study and the work of other scholars, and understands the relevance of such research to his/her own programme of study;

- *review of progress*: there should be a continual review with regard to the work undertaken by the student in relation to the overall timetable;
- *presentation skills*: opportunities should be identified for communication of research output and the development of relevant communication skills;

#### **7.3.4 Collaboration with external organisations**

As part of their studies, research students may be required to undertake short periods of research in collaborating organisations. Appropriate arrangements should be put in place at the outset of the research project to ensure that, although absent from the College, research student progress continues to be carefully monitored during such periods. This will normally involve periodic visits to the collaborating organisation by the supervisor(s) to meet with the research student and a designated external supervisor(s). Reciprocal visits should be encouraged, thereby promoting a constructive dialogue and a sense of partnership. Records of such discussions should be maintained. The external supervisor(s) in the collaborating organisation should be involved in formal reviews of progress undertaken by the supervisor(s)/College.

Where students are carrying out field work overseas the potential for supervisory visits may be limited. In such cases it will be necessary to establish good communications in order that there might be regular reporting back to the supervisor(s) who can, in turn, be expected to provide timely feedback. Where possible, arrangements should be made to provide external supervisory assistance for this phase of the research work.

#### **7.4 External students**

Supervisors should be aware of the importance attached to planning and initiating a programme of research and maintaining contact with those research students working in a degree of isolation or away from the University. For these students it is important that the principal supervisor develop with the student a Training Needs Analysis and that this is periodically reviewed.

Such students may live in the local area, in which case it should be possible for them to participate in a number of training schemes, seminars and school/departmental activities open to full-time students. If they reside in another part of the country direct contact may be more difficult. For students based abroad approval is frequently given for special arrangements involving an annual extended meeting with the supervisor. In the case of an external student, the internal principal supervisor should also ensure that regular contact is maintained with the designated external supervisor.

Under the relevant regulations students undertaking part or the whole of their research away from the College are required to meet with the internal supervisor at least once every four months to report on and to discuss the progress of their research. The exception would be in the case of a student located outside Malawi in which case, as indicated above, an alternative arrangement may be approved.

It is the student's responsibility to arrange for meetings to be held with the supervisor and to ensure in making such arrangements, that there will be sufficient time for discussion. It is the supervisor's responsibility to work with the students at times that are mutually convenient. In addition, supervisors should, on their own initiative, take action when a student has failed to make contact over a 3 month period.

The monitoring of progress and completion of an annual progress report is regarded as being of particular importance in the case of an external student. The latter procedure will enable potential difficulties to be identified and follow-up action initiated where there may, for example, be insufficient contact between supervisor and student. Research supervisors are required to keep a note of meetings held with students working away from the College and these details are provided as part of the annual progress report submitted to the Postgraduate Committee.

## **7.5 Unsatisfactory progress**

If at any stage during the period of study the principal supervisor considers the progress of the student to be unsatisfactory or that the standard of work is generally below that expected, it is important that the student should be made aware of the situation as soon as possible. It is expected that the principal supervisor, in consultation with the Postgraduate Studies Coordinator, will initially follow the informal steps of the "Capability Procedure" as detailed below before invoking the Formal Procedure.

It should be noted that at any meeting regarding unsatisfactory progress held between the student and their principal supervisor and/or the Postgraduate Studies Coordinator, whether at the informal or formal stage, the student has the right to be accompanied by a second person who can act as their "friend".

### **7.5.1 Informal Stage - "Capability Procedure"**

The Capability Procedure is to be used where a student's progress/competence is considered to be unsatisfactory. The aim of the procedure is to give full and sympathetic consideration and support to the student with a view to achieving a satisfactory standard of performance.

In such circumstances the principal supervisor will conduct an informal discussion with the student at the earliest opportunity. The discussion will include, where appropriate, the student's other supervisor(s). The



student should be advised of the purpose of the meeting in advance. At the meeting the principal supervisor will:

- i. bring to the student's attention those aspects of their performance which are considered to be unsatisfactory
- ii. seek agreement from the student regarding the nature of the problem
- iii. listen to and consider any explanation or statement made by the student
- iv. inform the student of the standard of performance that is expected and what support will be given to assist in achieving the required standard
- v. draw up a programme of support to assist the student to achieve the expected standard. This programme may include any or all of the following forms of assistance:
  - o further training
  - o the guidance of one or more additional supervisors
  - o support from the Postgraduate Studies Coordinator
- vi. inform the student of the arrangements to be made to monitor and record the student's performance at agreed intervals.
- vii. define a timescale within which the expected standard of performance should be achieved

The principal supervisor should record the outcome of the discussion including details of the support programme to be provided and, in particular, the timescale within which the expected standard of performance is to be achieved. This record should be agreed with the student and a copy then forwarded to the student and also kept on the student's file.

### **7.5.2 Formal Procedure**

Where the principal supervisor is not satisfied that the student has achieved the expected level of performance within the agreed timescale through the informal "Capability Procedure" the Formal Procedure will be followed. Similarly, where the student declines the opportunity to co-operate with the informal arrangement proposed, the Formal Procedure should be followed.

In such circumstances the Postgraduate Studies Coordinator will invite the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Research to co-ordinate arrangements for the Formal Procedure.

The Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Research will hold a meeting with the student, the principal supervisor and the Postgraduate Studies Coordinator. As in the case of the informal procedure the student should be informed with regard to the purpose of the meeting, advised that

formal procedures are now being invoked, and that a second person may accompany them as their “friend”.

At the meeting the Dean of Postgraduate Studies will:

- i. explore further those aspects of the student’s performance which are considered to be unsatisfactory. This will be in relation to the standard of performance expected which was outlined at the informal stage
- ii. seek agreement from the student regarding the nature of the problem
- iii. listen to and consider any explanation or statement made by the student
- iv. reiterate to the student the standard of performance that is expected and what support will be given to assist in achieving the required standard
- v. review the programme of support which was agreed at the informal stage, draw up as appropriate a further programme of support to assist the student to achieve the expected standard. This programme may include any or all of the following forms of assistance:
  - o further training
  - o the guidance of one or more additional supervisors
  - o support from the Postgraduate Studies Coordinator
- vi. define a timescale within which the expected standard of performance should be achieved.

The Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Research should record the outcome of the discussion including details of any further support programme to be provided and, in particular, the timescale within which the expected standard of performance is to be achieved. This record should be agreed with the student and a copy then forwarded to the student and also kept on the student’s file.

Where considered appropriate the Postgraduate Studies Coordinator, with the concurrence of the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Research, may issue a formal warning to the student that, in the absence of any improvement in performance by a specified date, a recommendation will be made for the student to withdraw from the University. The warning should be made verbally at the meeting held with the student and also confirmed in writing. The warning should be referred to in the record of the above meeting.

### **7.5.3 Termination of registration**

If after the issue of a formal warning the student has failed to make the necessary improvement in their performance within the timescale

specified a recommendation can be put forward by the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Research to the Postgraduate Committee that the candidate's registration be terminated. It will be necessary for full details to be provided with regard to the background to the recommendation and also for evidence to be produced confirming that the above procedures have been followed by the principal supervisor and the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Research. The Postgraduate Committee may, as necessary, request further information on the background to the case. A letter from the Chairman of the Postgraduate Committee is forwarded to the University Registrars Office outlining information concerning the termination of the registration. The termination of a student's registration is ultimately a matter for decision by Senate.

#### **7.5.4 Submission of a thesis for an MPhil Degree**

Candidates who fall in any of the following categories will submit a thesis that will be examined for an award of an MPhil degree:

1. Candidates who during their first year of study are deemed on academic grounds that they would struggle to achieve the set chapters for PhD thesis
2. 'Candidates who have achieved outcomes for two years of PhD studies, however, due to valid reasons, are unable to proceed with their research work to achieve the set chapters for a PhD thesis

Candidates can only submit a thesis for MPhil degree at the end of their second year of study and before the end of the third year of their postgraduate study starting from their registration date

## **8 The Student's Registration Progresses**

### **8.1 Presentation of written work**

Following guidance provided during initial discussions with the student regarding management of the project the principal supervisor will give detailed advice on the necessary completion dates for successive stages of the work so that the whole thesis may be submitted within the scheduled time. This will include requesting written work as appropriate, and returning such work with constructive criticism and in reasonable time.

If a student is following a research programme which will take more than one year to complete (e.g. full-time PhD), the supervisor should during the first year of study require at least one substantial piece of work (e.g. literature review, experimental write-up), which will assist in assessing the student's ability to proceed successfully through

subsequent years of the research programme. Students may be required to make a presentation of this work to other staff and/or students. In some areas the student will be set specific targets, for example in terms of a number of chapters to be produced in draft form by specific stages of their registration.

## **8.2 The communication of research outputs**

In discussion with the student, the supervisor(s) should explore opportunities for enabling the student to disseminate the findings of his/her research work and, in the process, to develop their communication skills. Supervisor(s) may wish to consider the following activities as a means of promoting the transmission of research outputs and the development of personal transferable skills:

- i. as part of the student's agreed study programme, s/he should be required to present one or more research seminars internally. Although in the early stages of the research project there may be few original results to communicate, in the later stages, when research outcomes are being communicated, the student should be encouraged to develop an ability to defend his/her work and respond to critical questioning;
- ii. in addition to internal research seminars, at an appropriate stage in the research project, the student should be encouraged to present the findings of his/her research (in written, oral or poster form) to national or international conferences. Consideration should be given to the need for funding assistance by the College or, if appropriate, a collaborating partner (research council or industrial/commercial organisation) or by application to a learned society or other external body;
- iii. it is recommended as good practice that during the course of the research (or following the award of a research degree) early consideration be given by the student and his/her supervisor to publishing the outcome of the research. Any such publication should include the name of the student together with the names of members of the supervisory team as appropriate.
- iv. it should be clear from the outset of producing a publication who is to be an author, what each author is to contribute to the text, and what is to be the sequence of authors' names on the publication. In view of the respective contributions made by the supervisor and student it is to be expected that any such publication should normally be put forward on a joint authorship basis.
- v. it is essential that the student be given full credit for his/her contribution to the research by including their name in the list of authors. The extent of that contribution should be taken into account when determining the sequence of authors. In this context supervisors are reminded that all candidates for the degree of PhD are required to satisfy the examiners that the thesis contains work which is worthy of publication in full, or in part.
- vi. communication skills are of particular importance in research. A high level of competence in communication, especially in writing, should be developed as the

research progresses, taking into account the differences in style which will be appropriate for particular purposes. Research students can refine their writing skills through the preparation of progress reports or internal working papers for their supervisor(s) and the College, as appropriate, and through the preparation of articles for publication.

- vii. the provision of training and opportunities for practice in oral examination techniques.

Through undertaking some or all of the activities outlined above, the research student should be better placed to prepare and defend an appropriately structured, clearly articulated and well reasoned thesis suitable for the award of a higher degree. Given the strict guidelines on completion by the University of Malawi, every encouragement should be given to the completion of the research thesis within the agreed time period.

### **8.3 The Thesis including the outline plan**

#### **8.3.1 Writing the Thesis**

Students should be encouraged to see the writing of their thesis as a continuing process which should be undertaken from the first year of registration. Written work which is completed as part of the annual assessment procedures, and any work submitted for publication may be used as the basis for sections in the thesis.

The following points represent good practice in this respect:

- i. A timetable for writing of the thesis should be prepared by the student and agreed with the supervisor. A thesis plan to assist students and supervisors in production of the thesis is available from the Office of the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Research.
- ii. The supervisor should guide the student in constructing the thesis and indicating the emphasis which should be placed on different aspects of the work.
- iii. Although the supervisor has a responsibility to advise students on the standard of the thesis it should be noted that the submitted version remains the responsibility of the student, who must be prepared to defend the submitted work before the examiners.
- iv. The extent to which a supervisor may be involved in the editing and polishing of a research thesis will vary depending on the needs of the student. The final responsibility for, and ownership of, the submitted work lies with the student, although the supervisor does have a duty to assist wherever possible with advice on the presentation of the thesis. It is the responsibility of the student to decide when to submit the thesis, taking due account of the principal supervisor's judgment and advice in consultation, where appropriate, with other supervisors.

### **8.3.2 Assistance in editing the thesis for students whose first language is not English**

- i. Although some allowance can be made in relation to style for those students whose first language is not English it is expected that the grammar, syntax, spelling and punctuation in all theses will be at an acceptable level.
- ii. It is **not** regarded as the supervisor's responsibility to edit a student's thesis. Supervisors may, however, find it helpful to edit one or more chapter/s of the work as an example for the student to follow.
- iii. Exceptionally, a student may require additional language assistance other than that which the supervisor is able to provide. It is essential that the person (or persons) who provide/s such assistance should not be expert in the relevant academic field and should amend only the English and not the content of the thesis. It is entirely the responsibility of the student to make arrangements with a Language Unit or an individual person for such assistance, including any payment involved.
- iv. In such circumstances the advisor(s) concerned is required to sign a form confirming that their involvement in correcting the thesis has been limited to aspects of English language. The advisor should be provided with the form at the outset of their involvement. The supervisor should ensure that the student is aware of these requirements. The student must submit the completed form to the principal supervisor on submission of the thesis. The principal supervisor and Postgraduate Studies Coordinator are, likewise, required to sign the form which is then retained on the student's file in the department.
- v. Where language assistance has been provided, other than that given by the supervisor(s), the student is required to refer to the help which they have received in an acknowledgement in the thesis.

### **8.3.3 Format and Length of Thesis**

Both MPhil and PhD theses shall have the following general format:

1. Title page
2. Declaration of authorship

3. Acknowledgements
4. Introduction and Literature Review Chapter
5. Materials and Method Chapter
6. Experimental chapters (between two and three for MPhil thesis and between three and five for PhD thesis)
7. Discussion Chapter
8. Summary Chapter
9. References
10. Appendices

Supervisors should be aware of the fact that external examiners can criticize theses for excessive length and should advise candidates accordingly. Taking this fact into account, the College regulations stipulate that theses should normally be no greater than 60,000 words in length with an absolute maximum of 80,000 words depending on the length of the three already published papers that count towards the thesis. Additional materials contained within the thesis, such as appendices or the bibliography are excluded from this upper limit. In the case of an MPhil thesis, the absolute maximum word count is 40,000 with a maximum three experimental (results) chapters.

#### **8.3.4 Title and sub-title**

The supervisor should advise the candidate with regard to the drafting of the thesis title and sub-title. It is expected that the title should be explicit and concise and reflect the nature and breadth of the thesis. The sub-title, which may not be more than thirty words in length, expands on the title and contains more detailed information regarding the work which has been undertaken. The title and sub-title should be put forward for approval to the relevant Postgraduate Studies Coordinator, normally not less than six months before submission of a PhD thesis. The candidate is also required to submit up to ten keywords for the purpose of indexing. A form for use in putting forward a thesis title and sub-title for approval is available at from the Office of the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Research

## **9 Difficulties Encountered on the Way**

### **9.1 Suspension and extension of registration**

In the event of illness or where personal difficulties of a serious nature have arisen it is possible to suspend a student's registration for an appropriate period. In such circumstances it is necessary for the principal supervisor to put forward a case to the

Postgraduate Committee outlining the background to the request. If the registration is suspended the time involved does not count towards the student's maximum/minimum period of registration. It would not be normal for a student's registration to be suspended for a period of less than two months. In particular circumstances, for example where a student is on maternity leave, it may be possible, where appropriate, to arrange for certain Learning Support Services, including the Library, to be made available whilst the registration of the person concerned is suspended. Students should contact their principal supervisor to discuss further. In the case of maternity leave individual circumstances will dictate the length of time for which a suspension of time may be appropriate. This will be a matter for discussion and agreement between the student and principal supervisor.

Any application for an extension to the registration (i.e. lengthening of the maximum period of study) should likewise be put forward through the principal supervisor. Such cases are considered very carefully by the Postgraduate Committee and would normally be expected to show that some unforeseen circumstances had arisen which had significantly and adversely affected the student's progress and against which precautions could not reasonably have been taken. Any request for an extension of time will be treated by the College as a very serious matter and it is essential that any such proposal is put forward before the end of the standard period of registration.

It is the duty of the principal supervisor to keep any external supervisor informed with regard to progress especially in those circumstances where it may be necessary to either suspend a registration or seek an extension of time.

## **9.2 Departure/absence of a supervisor**

Occasionally a situation can arise in which a supervisor retires, transfers to another institution or is absent from the University for an extended period owing to illness, sabbatical leave or other reasons. In such circumstances it is essential that alternative arrangements are made in advance by the supervisory team with the Postgraduate Studies Coordinator in order to ensure the continuity of supervision. If the Principal Supervisor is unable to continue supervising for a period longer than three months it is the responsibility of the Postgraduate Studies Coordinator to appoint a replacement Principal Supervisor until such time that the original supervisor is able to resume his/her role. The replacement supervisor will have full responsibility for regulatory and administrative aspects of the student's registration.

## **9.3 Resolving problems experienced by the research student**

Problems which arise during the course of the student's research should normally be discussed initially with the principal supervisor. Students who consider that their work is not proceeding satisfactorily for reasons beyond their control may, however, make representations to the Postgraduate Studies Coordinator (or his/her alternate). Students may, as appropriate, be advised to contact their Head of Department, Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Research or the Chair of the Postgraduate Committee.



Supervisors should appreciate that these procedures may enable a student who considered that an effective working relationship was not being established with their supervisor to initiate an amendment being made to the supervisory arrangements.

On a similar basis a supervisor who experiences difficulties in establishing a working relationship with a student should, in the first instance, discuss the matter with their Postgraduate Studies Coordinator and/or the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Research. This procedure may, likewise, enable a supervisor to initiate an amendment being made to the supervisory arrangements.

The nature of the relationship between a supervisor and research student is such that there are bound to be times when there will be tension or strain between the individuals involved. Very occasionally a situation can develop in which a research student feels that they are being subject to personal harassment including bullying. Any incidence of harassment will be regarded extremely seriously by the College. Supervisors should be aware that in such circumstances, in addition to those members of staff referred to above, a student can seek help in confidence from one of the 'Contact Persons' who are available to listen, advise and where necessary, organise help.

Students are advised that any problems which arise during their period of study should be brought to the attention of the Postgraduate Studies Coordinator (or other persons as noted above) in order that any such difficulties may be resolved before submission of the thesis. It should be noted that, unless any problems regarding inadequacy of supervisory or other arrangements during the period of study are raised before submission of the thesis, no subsequent appeal against a decision of the Examiners may be made based on a complaint on these grounds, unless there are exceptional reasons for it not having come to light until after the assessment.

#### **9.4 Withdrawal of a student's registration**

Exceptionally, it may prove necessary to put forward a recommendation to the Postgraduate Committee and Senate that a student's registration be terminated on the grounds of unsatisfactory progress. Full details with regard to the procedures involved in making any such recommendation are contained in 7.5.3 above.

Other circumstances can, occasionally, result in the withdrawal of a student's registration. These may include failure to pay tuition fees or lack of contact over an extended period with the supervisor(s) and other College departments. Any such case would be considered carefully by the Registry and Postgraduate Committee in consultation with the principal supervisor and other interested parties before a decision was taken to withdraw a student's registration.

## **10 The Final Stages**

### **10.1 Writing-up status**

The normal expectation is for a student to complete and submit their thesis within the minimum period of full registration. In the case of a full-time doctoral candidate this is three years. If the student does not submit their thesis by the end of this period but has completed the research programme they may transfer to “writing-up” status. For a science student a transfer to writing-up would normally occur after they had completed all research work. In order for the transfer to be approved it is necessary for the principal supervisor to write to the Registry confirming that from a date specified the student was solely engaged on the writing of the thesis.

A fee is charged in the first year of “writing-up”. It would only be in exceptional circumstances that a student would register for a second year as a “writing-up” student i.e. the thesis should have been submitted within the maximum four year period. The fee is increased subsequent year of registration as a “writing-up” student.

“Writing-up” students are permitted to make full use of normal borrowing facilities by the College Library and retain access to email, the internet and College networking facilities. It is left to the discretion of individual departments as to the extent to which “writing-up” students are permitted to make use of departmental facilities without a charge being raised. The supervisory support provided to a student registered on a writing-up basis will be arranged within the academic area concerned but in all cases will be at a far lower level than that applicable in the case of a full-time candidate. As a minimum, a research student can expect to have the equivalent of 1 hour’s support per month with their supervisor(s) whilst they are registered on a writing-up basis.

### **10.2 Appointment of Examiners**

- i. Two Examiners are normally appointed for each candidate for the degree of PhD, one of whom is an External Examiner and the other a member of the academic staff of the University who shall not normally be the candidate’s supervisor. It is possible in particular circumstances to appoint a third Examiner, for example, to cover the range of expertise required in relation to a particular thesis.
- ii. A candidate for the degree of PhD who is a member of full-time academic staff is examined by two External Examiners and not by a member of the academic staff of the College. In such circumstances a Link Person is appointed to liaise with the candidate and the External Examiners in coordinating arrangements for the oral examination. This person may, for example, be the candidate’s supervisor. A Link Person is, likewise, appointed in the case of any such candidate who has exceptionally been permitted to work for the degree without supervision. The Link Person may, subject to the agreement of the Examiners and the candidate, attend the oral examination as an observer. A Research Assistant is classified as a member of academic-related rather than academic staff and, as such, the

normal arrangements for appointment of examiners as outlined in paragraph i. above are applicable.

- iii. It is the responsibility of the principal supervisor to put forward proposals in a timely manner for the appointment of Internal and External Examiners. This would normally be three months prior to submission. Recommendations should be submitted on the appropriate form which is available from Registry. The completed form should be forwarded to the relevant Postgraduate Studies Coordinator for approval and onward transmission to Registry.
- iv. Where an External Examiner has not previously acted at that level (or a higher level) at the College, or elsewhere, a list of the Examiner's publications in relevant fields of research is required to be submitted with the form, together with a short statement on their examining experience which will assist the Postgraduate Committee in assessing their suitability for examining the candidate. In such circumstances it may be appropriate to appoint a senior Internal Examiner with relevant experience. Exceptionally, a second External Examiner with the relevant examining experience can be appointed to act with the proposed Examiner.
- v. It should be noted that it would not be appropriate for an individual whose own research forms an important part of the student's thesis, to be appointed as an External Examiner. In addition, it is considered that it would be inappropriate to appoint an Examiner, whether Internal or External, who had played a significant part in advising the candidate, particularly where collaboration has led to the publication of joint papers by the candidate and the proposed Examiner. It is accepted that the External Examiner may be acquainted with the supervisor, and/or the candidate, and that this in itself is not a bar to acting as an Examiner.
- vi. It should be noted that supervisors are required to inform their research students of the proposed nominations for the appointment of Examiners, in order that any difficulties which might arise in relation to the appointment of a particular individual can be identified and resolved at an early stage in the assessment process.
- vii. The attention of supervisors and Postgraduate Studies Coordinator is drawn to the need to proceed with caution in appointing an individual External Examiner on too frequent a basis.
- viii. The University approves the following summary guidelines to be taken into account when appointing Examiners:
  - The need for a 'balanced' examination team – experience & expertise
  - The student should be invited to comment on the proposed Examiners – but is not allowed to select.
  - *Both* Examiners should be independent of the student's work

This means:

- no intellectual input during thesis work
  - no joint publication
  - no familial, sponsorship or other relationship
  - the candidate may, however, know the examiners – may have visited the External Examiner’s group, met at a conference etc
- The same principles should apply with regard to any potential relationship which might exist between either of the Examiners and the supervisor(s)
  - External Examiner – subject specialist, directs discussion, chairs the Panel
  - Internal Examiner – examines, ensures fair play, pastoral care
  - Chair of Board (if appointed) promotes fair play & regulations and reports on process
  - It is advisable:
    - **Not** to use the same External Examiner too frequently (eg more than once per year)
    - **Not** to appoint an External Examiner who has published frequently with the supervisor.
    - To give consideration to the extent of overlap of the field of published research of the External Examiner in relation to the research area of the thesis – in case the candidate’s work strongly supports (or opposes) the findings of the External Examiner, thereby introducing a potential source of bias in the examination

### **10.2.1 Attendance of the supervisor at the oral examination**

Although the supervisor(s) is not normally appointed as Internal Examiner s/he may nevertheless be allowed to attend the oral examination. The supervisor may be invited to offer comments by the Examiners at any appropriate point during the examination process including the oral examination. The supervisor may request permission to clarify a particular point during the course of the oral examination. Candidates should be consulted by the Internal Examiner prior to the oral examination to confirm whether or not the supervisor should be present. The supervisor will not attend the oral examination if the student has expressed a preference that s/he should not do so. If the student does indicate that they would prefer the supervisor not to attend it is the responsibility of the Internal Examiner to advise the supervisor accordingly. The supervisor(s) and the candidate are required to

withdraw from the oral examination before a formal decision on the thesis is taken.

If the supervisor does not attend the oral examination s/he should, if at all possible, be contactable during the examination in order that the Examiners may, if they wish, seek clarification on any particular issues, which may have arisen in relation to the work submitted.

### **10.3 Examination of the thesis**

Examination of MPhil and PhD candidates shall take two forms: Thesis examination and an Oral Examination

The external and the internal examiner shall examine the thesis within three months from the day they receive copies of the theses from the Postgraduate Dean's office. They are required to submit an independent, confidential, written report on the thesis. Examiners should not discuss the thesis with anyone until after all reports have been submitted.

The external and internal examiner shall mark the thesis based on the Thesis Evaluation Guidelines as stipulated below. Each guideline is to be graded on a 0-5 point scale with 0 being Poor and 5 as Excellent. The mark or points will then be averaged to come up with a final score. A candidate shall pass the examination if he/she gets an average mark of 50%. A PhD thesis may be considered for an award of an MPhil degree if the candidate final score is between 40 – 49%.

#### **10.3.1 Thesis Evaluation Guidelines**

In evaluating a thesis, an examiner shall have to consider:

- Whether a thorough study of relevant literature has been made and whether it has been presented in a balanced manner and adequately related to the investigation.
- Whether suitable methods of investigation have been employed and adequately described.
- Whether results are presented clearly and appropriately; the interpretations were objectively and responsibly made; and whether the scientific value thereof have been evaluated.
- Whether there is an unquestionable contribution to new scientific knowledge in the particular field of study.
- Whether the general presentation, style and language are acceptable.
- What alterations, modifications and deficiencies, if any, in the thesis are required for the candidate to pass the examination

### 10.3.2 Approval by the Supervisory Committee

Subject to approval by the supervisory committee, the candidate is expected to incorporate all corrections and address all relevant comments, suggestions and modifications from the external examiner and internal assessor and present an amended thesis within 3 months to be approved by the Internal Examiner before an oral examination is conducted.

### 10.4 Support provided for a student permitted to undertake amendments to a thesis

- i. Members of the supervisory team have a duty of care to the student in providing advice where the Examiners have recommended that amendments be made to the thesis. This will be equally applicable in the case of a student permitted to revise and re-present the thesis or where minor corrections are required to be undertaken.
- ii. Where the Examiners have recommended that a candidate be permitted to revise and represent the thesis the Internal Examiner will forward to the principal supervisor a full statement describing those areas in which the thesis was found to be unsatisfactory. It is the responsibility of the principal supervisor to pass this statement to the candidate and to advise as appropriate. It is intended that this process should enable the candidate to commence work on the resubmission as soon as possible.
- iii. If the supervisor has left the College or is otherwise unavailable it is the responsibility of the Postgraduate Studies Coordinator to ensure that a replacement supervisor is appointed in order that appropriate support may be provided to the student.
- iv. If, exceptionally, the supervisory team is unable to provide the necessary advice for a student revising his or her thesis, the matter should be referred to the Postgraduate Studies Coordinator who may in seeking to resolve the issues involved consult, as appropriate, with the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Research.
- v. If the candidate is required to undertake additional work (e.g. produce or process new data) it is the responsibility of the department and principal supervisor to ensure that the student is provided with access to appropriate facilities in order that the work may be completed.
- vi. A resubmitted thesis, together with the relevant documentation, will be dispatched to the Examiners by The Examinations Office on the same basis as the initial submission. Given the complications which can arise, College Supervisors (or any other person, including the candidate) may not send an unbound copy of the revised thesis directly to the Internal and/or External Examiner prior to formal resubmission of the work.
- vii. The maximum period permitted for completion of minor amendments for a PhD is **three** months and for resubmission of a thesis **twelve** months.

## **10.5 Oral Examination**

An oral examination shall commence with a Public seminar during which a candidate will be expected to present his/her results. The candidate shall be allocated 40 - 60 minutes for presentation and 20 - 30 minutes for discussion.

Following the presentation, the candidate shall attend a one-hour closed-door oral (viva voce) examination, chaired by the Dean of Postgraduate Studies as Chairperson of the Postgraduate Committee.

### **10.5.1 Membership of the Viva Voce Assessment:**

- Dean of Postgraduate Studies - Chairperson
- External examiner
- Other members of the Supervisory Committee
- Selected experts in the field of students' specialization
- Head of Department
- Dean of Faculty
- Invited Heads of relevant departments or their representatives

### **10.5.2 Grading criteria**

Each member of the panel shall be allowed to ask questions based on the thesis or the public seminar. Each panel member shall assess each candidate based on the following criteria:

- General presentation
- Knowledge of subject matter
- Ability to answer questions

The grading shall be on a 0-5 point scale where 0 = Poor and 5 = Excellent. The mark or points will then be averaged to come up with a final score. A candidate shall pass the examination if he/she gets an average mark of 50%.

A candidate must pass both the oral and thesis examinations to be awarded the PhD Degree in Philosophy. The supervisory committee shall also evaluate the student based on the candidate's performance during the study and research work periods

### **10.5.3 Comments by External Examiners**

The examiners may make any other relevant comments towards a fair evaluation of the thesis. They will be required to indicate in the

report whether the degree **should** or **should NOT** be awarded to the candidate

#### **10.5.4 Results**

The results of these examinations should be indicated in the Result of Final Examination Form.

The results will only be indicated if the candidate has incorporated all comments and corrections mentioned or discussed during the public seminar and closed session if approved by the supervisory committee

#### **10.5.5 Consequences of failure of oral examination**

In the event that a candidate does not satisfy the Oral Defense Committee, the Postgraduate Dean shall inform the candidate and the Postgraduate Committee shall recommend to Senate a re-presentation of the Oral Assessment within six months of the Senate decision

#### **10.5.6 Dissemination of results**

The Postgraduate Dean shall recommend and forward the results to the Senate

The results can only be published and be made known to the candidate, faculty and College subject to approval by Senate

### **10.6 Appeals by research students against academic assessment**

A research student may appeal against the following decisions of the Postgraduate Committee:

- i. a requirement to withdraw following a report of unsatisfactory progress
- ii. to require revision and re-presentation of a thesis
- iii. not to permit representation of a thesis
- iv. not to award a degree for which the student was registered

The grounds for appeal may be any of the following

- i. That there exist circumstances affecting the candidate's performance of which the Postgraduate Committee was not aware when it took its decision.
- ii. That there were procedural irregularities in the conduct of the assessment.
- iii. That there is evidence of a significant administrative error
- iv. That there is evidence of prejudice or bias on the part of one or more of the assessors or examiners.
- v. That the arrangements for supervision were inadequate.
- vi. That the decision of the Postgraduate Committee was such that no reasonable body of people could reasonably have arrived at that decision.



Students may only appeal on the first five of these grounds if there was good reason why they did not inform the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Research, in writing of all relevant circumstances in advance of the Postgraduate Committee meeting.