

# **Policy for the Award of Posthumous and Aegrotat Postgraduate Research Degrees**

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## **Introduction**

1. This policy relates to the award of a postgraduate research (PGR) degree in the event of the death of the candidate (posthumous) or the diagnosis of a terminal / debilitating illness or other incapacitation, prior to the completion of their programme (aegrotat).
2. This policy is applicable to students registered with the Imperial College London (hereafter “the university”) to complete postgraduate research degrees including PhD, EngD, MD(Res), and MPhil. It does not apply to Doctor of Science (DSc) applications.
3. This policy should be referred to alongside the relevant ordinances, regulations and policies relating to postgraduate research.
4. Where a student is completing a PhD classed as a “1+3” award (1-year MRes followed by a 3-year PhD programme), this policy applies to the research (PhD) section only. Where a candidate is incapacitated during the MRes section of the programme, the relevant section of the [Regulations for Taught Programmes of Study](#) applies.
5. As part of any consideration of a posthumous or aegrotat award, there will be liaison with the candidate’s family/ nominated next of kin, or, where appropriate, the candidate in the case of aegrotat awards, prior to any application being made. The point of contact for the university with the candidate/candidate’s family will be responsible for sharing the outcome of consideration under this policy. Please see also the [Student Death Protocol](#) for details of how the university handles the event of a student death.
6. A guidance document to support the consideration of posthumous or aegrotat awards is available and should be provided to relevant staff and examiners that are involved in the examination of a candidate under this policy.

## **Posthumous and Aegrotat Award Eligibility**

7. PGR examiners may recommend that a posthumous award should be made following the death of a candidate. Posthumous awards should have the support of the deceased candidate’s family prior to any consideration to make an application or an examination.
8. PGR examiners may recommend the award of an aegrotat research degree if it is considered that a candidate’s diagnosis of a terminal/debilitating illness or their incapacitation would preclude them from making the final submission of the thesis, undertaking the viva, modifications to the thesis or a resubmission of the thesis.

9. The candidate, or candidate's family on their behalf, are required to confirm that they will accept an aegrotat award prior to any consideration to make an application or an examination.
10. The aegrotat award will be considered as the conclusion of a student's registration on the programme, and there will be no further re-assessment. In line with the university regulations, the candidate would not be permitted to enter a further period of research study based on the same topic.
11. Both posthumous and aegrotat research degrees may be awarded at any stage of the programme or examination process.
12. In the case of both aegrotat and posthumous awards, the candidate should have completed a significant enough body of work to demonstrate that they would have met the appropriate standard for the award.
13. In the case of PhD, EngD or MD(Res), where a student has not completed sufficient work to be considered for their registered target award, consideration will be given for an application of a posthumous or aegrotat MPhil degree.

## **Awards after Examination / Submission**

14. Where a thesis has already been submitted and a viva has already taken place (prior to the death, diagnosis or incident which prevents the student from being able to continue with their research), the examination procedure should continue, as closely as possible, in accordance with the relevant examination policy.
15. If the thesis has been submitted but not yet examined, the examination will proceed as normal with the exception that any oral examination, corrections, or minor revisions will not be required.
16. The examiners should consider the merits of the work as presented and the candidate's potential to complete should they have been able to continue. In place of the viva the examiners will be permitted to request additional information and/or ask questions of the supervisory team, prior to making an award recommendation via a joint examiner report.
17. The examiners may make one of the following recommendations:
  - a. There is sufficient evidence that the relevant posthumous or aegrotat award should be granted.
  - b. There is insufficient evidence to award the relevant posthumous or aegrotat degree however, there is sufficient evidence to award an MPhil.
  - c. There is insufficient evidence to make an award.
18. In exceptional circumstances, examiners may submit separate reports with the permission of Assessment Records Team. Examiners who are unable to agree on a recommendation must submit separate reports. These reports must clearly articulate the reasoning for their recommendation. For further action see paragraphs 31-32.
19. The decision not to make an award does not constitute grounds for an academic appeal.

## Awards before Examination / Submission

20. Where a thesis has not yet been submitted for examination the supervisor/s must consider whether there is sufficient quantity and quality of material to represent the thesis:

- a. a full thesis;
- b. partially complete thesis;
- c. draft thesis chapters;
- d. Published work such as conference posters/presentations or journal articles;
- e. datasets from research conducted;
- f. draft publications;
- g. any related documentation which was to have been incorporated into the thesis; any other supporting information e.g., progress reports).

The supervisor/s must be satisfied that there is enough to permit an academic judgement to be made.

21. For a posthumous award, the main supervisor is responsible for presenting the candidate's work for consideration by a panel consisting of the Head of Department, Director of Postgraduate Studies, and Postgraduate Senior Tutor, hereafter referred to as 'the Panel'. The main supervisor should not add to or enhance the work. The main supervisor will be required to confirm that the work is the candidate's own.

22. Where there is or may be a perceived conflict of interests in the Panel, for example a normal member of the panel is a supervisor of the candidate or has had significant involvement with the student for other reasons, the Head of Department will liaise with the Early Career Researcher Institute to agree a suitable replacement. This may be another experienced member of the department, the student's ESA or LSR assessor, or other person deemed suitable. If necessary, an appropriate member of staff from another department may be requested to join the Panel.

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

24. The main supervisor must put forward a written statement of support for the posthumous or aegrotat award, giving reasons why they feel that the degree should be awarded, in line with the expectations as outlined in the relevant examination regulations for the award.

25. The Panel will consider the compiled candidate's work and the supervisor report. If the panel is satisfied that there is a case for an award to be made, examiners will be nominated to assess the work, in accordance with the normal requirements for award.

26. If the decision is to proceed to examination, internal and external examiners will be appointed in line with the university regulations. The examiners must be made aware of the circumstances surrounding the submission, that is that they are considering an aegrotat or posthumous award.
27. The examiners should consider the supervisor report, the merits of the work as presented and the candidate's potential to complete should they have been able to continue. In place of the viva the examiners will be permitted to request additional information and/or ask questions of the supervisory team, prior to making an award recommendation via a joint examiner report.
28. The examiners may make one of the following recommendations:
  - a. There is sufficient evidence that the relevant posthumous or aegrotat award should be granted.
  - b. There is insufficient evidence to award the relevant posthumous or aegrotat degree however, there is sufficient evidence to award the relevant exit award.
  - c. There is insufficient evidence to make an award.
29. In exceptional circumstances, examiners may submit separate reports with the permission of the Early Career Researcher Institute/Assessment Records Team. Examiners who are unable to agree on a recommendation must submit separate reports.
30. The decision not to make an award does not constitute grounds for an academic appeal.

## **Review of outcomes if the examiners cannot agree on a final recommendation**

31. Where the examiners cannot agree on a recommendation, their reports and the material considered will be reviewed by the Deputy Director (Academic) of the Early Career Researcher Institute with the support of an examiner if considered appropriate to agree the final recommendation.
32. This final recommendation, with detailed explanation of their reasoning, will be held with the record of the decision and will be considered final.

## **Diploma of Imperial College London**

33. In line with the [General Regulations](#) any candidate granted an award under this policy will also receive a Diploma of Imperial College (DIC).

## **Liaising with the candidate/ family**

34. The point of contact will advise the candidate/ candidate's family of the outcome of consideration under this policy.
35. Where appropriate the point of contact will liaise as necessary with regards to certificate and/or attendance at a relevant graduation ceremony.

36. When providing an outcome that the full award cannot be granted, the point of contact will ensure that this would have been due to a lack of *evidence* to support the award rather than a comment on the absolute quality of the research that could have been completed.

## **Certification / Graduation**

37. Where a posthumous or aegrotat award is made it is not required that the resulting certificate be marked as such.

38. In the case of a posthumous award, or where an aegrotat awardee is unable to attend, a family member or nominee may be permitted to attend a graduation ceremony to receive the award on behalf of the awardee.

## **Intellectual Property (IP)**

39. The university's [Intellectual Property \(IP\) Policy](#) defines how IP generated at the university is managed and owned. IP is considered an 'intangible asset', and as such would form the part of the estate of a person that has died. Where IP is owned entirely by the student, this will be managed as part of the estate.

40. If an award is being considered, the Enterprise Records office must be contacted to confirm if a student is registered, and if so to ensure that commercialisation of any IP owned in full or in part by the student is shared with the student, or in the case of their death the beneficiaries of their estate.

41. If there are any queries about IP, this should be raised with the Director of the Research Office in the first instance.

## **Accessing student files**

42. If it is necessary to access a student's personal Imperial account, any requests must follow the university procedures to ensure that this conforms with the university's legal duties. For further information on this matter, the Head of the Central Secretariat should be contacted in the first instance for advice and guidance.

## **Subsequent publication**

### **Named author in publications, such as journals**

43. Where work is to be published with the student as an author and permission of the student cannot be obtained with regards to their contribution, it may be published. However, proper acknowledgement should be given, and the publisher advised.

44. As the student would not be able to liaise as needed with the publisher, this would ordinarily prevent them from being the primary author. It should be noted that except in exceptional circumstances amendments or retractions are not possible after publication as the permission of all authors would be required.

## Using student data in other publications

45. Standard research practices will apply in the use of any data or findings made by the student, as it would for any other data set or findings.

### Spiral

46. Given the nature of the submissions made under this procedure, it is unlikely that following an award that this will be published to Spiral, as would be normal practice. Decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis, and any publications through Spiral may need an appropriate foreword.

47. Advice and guidance on publication should be sought from the Early Career Researcher Institute in the first instance.

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