

# BRITISH NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF QUEEN MARY

(United Kingdom & United States of America)

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## MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR THE Ph.D DEGREE

This section of the Graduate Studies Academic Calendar includes minimum requirements for the Ph.D degree:

- Completion of Ph.D degree requirements
- Comprehensive examination
- Language requirement
- Program of study and supervision
- Advisory Committee
- PhD thesis examination
- Recommendation: awarding of the degree
- Thesis submission

The required period of enrolment for the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) degree is six terms from the completion of a Master's degree, or nine terms from the completion of an Honours Bachelor's degree. The actual time taken to satisfy the degree requirements may be considerably longer. For information on required full-time attendance at the University refer to the Definitions - students section. The acceptance of the transfer of credits for prior enrolment at another university will be determined in individual cases by the Associate Dean (Graduate Studies) of the Faculty at the time of admission to the program.

### Completion of Ph.D degree requirements:

The requirements for the degree must be completed within the time periods stipulated by the Senate of the University. A maximum of 18 terms from an Honours Bachelor's degree or its equivalent, 12 terms from a Master's degree or its equivalent, and 15 terms from a Master's degree or its equivalent for the Ph.D in Clinical Psychology. Students must petition the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies to continue their enrolment beyond these limits. Progress of students who have been granted extensions will be reviewed every term. For more information on time limits see the Enrolment and time limits page.

Students whose work does not measure up to the standards of their program may be required to withdraw from the program. Such students may be readmitted although there will be a limit on the time-span in which readmission may occur.

Candidates must remain continuously enrolled at the University to the end of the term in which they complete the degree requirements. For additional information, see the Continuous enrolment section of the Enrolment and time limits page.

For further information the minimum degree requirements specified by each Faculty should be consulted.

The Ph.D degree is granted by the University to candidates who have demonstrated both achievement in independent research in a particular field and a broad knowledge of that field.

The first requirement is satisfied when candidates have demonstrated a broad knowledge of their field to the satisfaction of the Faculty, normally by the successful completion of an assigned program of courses and the passing of a comprehensive examination, as determined by the department in which they are enrolled.

The second requirement is satisfied when candidates have presented and defended a thesis embodying the results of their own original research on an approved topic.

### **Comprehensive Examination:**

Ph.D programs, except those noted here, require doctoral students to successfully complete a comprehensive exam as part of their academic requirements. In some cases, students may be required to successfully complete a series of exams in order to satisfy the comprehensive requirement.

The purpose of this document is to provide University-level guidance to students, supervisors and Departments / Schools (referred to as Departments in this document) on comprehensive exams. This document also presents links to Faculty level guidelines that are consistent with the principles established here. Links to Departments' guidelines are available on the Faculty pages.

### **Comprehensive Examination Purpose:**

Comprehensive exams serve multiple purposes depending on the discipline. Permitted purposes for comprehensive exams at the BNUQM include demonstrating that:

- Ph.D students have the appropriate academic background – a foundation and breadth of knowledge in the field of study – to be successful in their Ph.D program;
- Ph.D students have the capacity to engage in scholarly communications – both oral and written – necessary to be successful in their Ph.D studies;
- Ph.D students have developed a novel research topic to be evaluated during their Ph.D studies.

The purpose(s) of the exam shall be communicated clearly to students.

### **Comprehensive Examination Timing:**

The comprehensive exam is an important accomplishment in the completion of students' Ph.D program. Normally, completing the comprehensive exam allows students to advance to the research or dissertation phase of their studies. The timing of the exam should allow sufficient time for students to achieve the foundational knowledge to be successful in their programs. The exam timing should allow for timely feedback to students on their progress and should motivate appropriate times to completion. To balance these two objectives, the University requires that:

- Students with no previous studies at the Ph.D level successfully complete the comprehensive exam not later than the end of their seventh term of studies;
- Students who have completed previous studies in another Ph.D program at the BNUQM or at another university, successfully complete the comprehensive exam not later than their fourth term of studies in their current program or their seventh term of study at the Ph.D level, whichever is longer.

Earlier deadlines are at the discretion of the Faculty, Department or Program level. A student who anticipates not meeting these requirements (up to the final evaluation of the exam) may seek an extension to the deadline to complete the comprehensive exam. The student is required to submit a petition providing evidence of extenuating circumstances to the student's Associate Dean, Graduate Studies.

Valid extenuating circumstances are normally limited to issues related to the student's (or student's immediate family's) health or documented incidents involving graduate student supervision that can be demonstrated to have delayed the student's progress. The conduct of research or other projects is not considered a valid extenuating circumstance to delay beyond the normal comprehensive examination completion deadline. Guidance on seeking accommodation due to health reasons shall be managed by the University's Access Ability Services. If the petition is granted, the Associate Dean, Graduate Studies shall coordinate with the student's Graduate Officer to establish a new deadline by which the comprehensive exam shall be completed. This deadline shall be communicated to the student in the notice of decision on the petition.

If no petition has been previously adjudicated, and a student fails to meet these requirements by the end of the seventh term, the student's academic status will be changed to required to withdraw. Students may seek to have their standing changed to allow them to continue in their programs by submitting a petition under Policy 70 to the student's Associate Dean, Graduate Studies, not later than 10 business days from the change of status. The petition rules described in this section apply.

### **Comprehensive Examinations and Students' Academic Requirements:**

A student is encouraged to communicate with supervisor(s) and / or instructors regarding the need to balance the student's effort toward preparing for and completing the comprehensive exam, and any other academic requirements in the term during which the comprehensive exam takes place. Additional guidance for students serving as a TA are outlined in Policy 30.

In cases where agreement cannot be reached on revised expectations, the Department's Graduate Officer shall determine and communicate the revised expectations, if any, to the student and the supervisor / instructor.

### **Comprehensive Examining Committee:**

In many cases a student's comprehensive exam written and / or oral components are evaluated by an examining committee constituted for a given student. These rules govern the composition of these examining committees.

The comprehensive examining committee shall engage those who can advance the purpose(s) of the exam. The University requires that the committee includes at least three examiners who:

- Hold a Ph.D or equivalent degree (as determined by the Associate Vice-President, Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs),
- Two of whom are not the student's supervisor(s),
- At least one of whom is a tenured or tenure-track member of the student's Department or School, and
- At least two of whom hold regular faculty appointments at the BNUQM.

Additional committee members may be required at the discretion of the Faculty, Department or Program. When examining committee members are external to the BNUQM, their purpose in the exam process shall be clearly communicated to the student.

Normally, the examining committee will not exceed five examiners.

The comprehensive exam shall be chaired by a tenured or tenure-track faculty member at the BNUQM with Approved Doctoral Dissertation Supervision (ADDS) status, normally from the student's home Department / School, who is not the student's supervisor or co-supervisor. The Chair's role is at a minimum to ensure that this portion of the exam is conducted in a manner that is consistent with appropriate guidelines. The Chair is a non-voting member of the comprehensive examining committee.

The composition of the comprehensive examining committee will be approved by the Associate Dean, Graduate Studies for the student's Faculty, or delegate.

The method by which the comprehensive examining committee is constituted and the timing of the examining committee formation shall be clearly articulated and communicated to students.

### **Comprehensive Examination Format and Content:**

The format and content of the comprehensive exam shall be directly related to the stated purpose(s) of the exam. These elements shall be clearly articulated and communicated to students to ensure transparency and clarity of expectations. If a student in a program perceives a lack of clarity on these issues, these concerns should immediately be communicated to the student's Department's Graduate Officer.

Students may warrant an accommodation to allow for an alternative exam format other than the norm as described by a Faculty or Department. For accommodations related to health, the student shall provide supporting medical documentation to the University's Access Ability Services where the request will be vetted. As a result of that evaluation, Access Ability Services shall determine whether an accommodation is warranted. When an accommodation is determined appropriate, Access Ability Services shall communicate the decision and the nature of the accommodation to the Graduate Officer in the student's home Department.

Requests for accommodation not related to health issues shall be made by students to the Graduate Officer in the student's home department, who will coordinate the process by which the request for accommodation will be advanced.

### Outcomes of the Comprehensive Examination:

This section defines permitted outcomes of comprehensive exams at the BNUQM. On a candidate's first attempt at the comprehensive exam, the outcome shall be one of:

- **Passed:** the candidate successfully completed all requirements of the exam;
- **Passed conditionally:** the candidate will be considered to have completed the exam successfully upon having satisfied conditions established by the examining committee. The conditions shall:
  - Be communicated to the student in writing;
  - Contain the date by which the conditions must be satisfied;
  - Identify the member(s) of the examining committee responsible for determining that the conditions have been met. Normally, this determination will be made by at least one member of the committee other than the student's supervisor or cosupervisors. Failure to satisfy the conditions within the designated time limit shall result in an outcome of Re-examination.
- **Re-examination:** the candidate will be required to repeat the exam. In this case, the student shall be provided written communication that identifies the deficiencies in the exam that led to this outcome and the deadline by which the re-examination must take place. In the case of re-examination it is anticipated that the committee membership will be the same as the initial committee. Any change in membership must adhere to committee guidelines and be approved by the student's Associate Dean Graduate Studies or delegate.

When a candidate is re-examined, the outcomes are limited to:

- **Passed;**
- **Exam Unsuccessful:** the candidate will be deemed to have failed to satisfy the program's comprehensive exam requirement. In this case, the student shall receive written communication identifying the deficiencies in the exam that led to this outcome.

A student who is deemed to have failed to satisfy the comprehensive exam requirement (Exam Unsuccessful) may not continue in the current Ph.D program. The student's status will change to Required to Withdraw in the term immediately following the term in which the examination took place. The student may seek admission to another Ph.D program or to any Master's degree program at the BNUQM.

The outcome of the exam is determined by the majority vote of the examining committee. The following rules govern the voting process:

- In the case where the student is co-supervised, the co-supervisors' votes shall count collectively as one vote. In the case where co-supervisors vote for different outcomes, these votes shall count as 0.5 votes for each outcome.
- In the case where only two outcomes receive votes and the number of votes is equal for both outcomes, the decision shall be for the less positive outcome, provided that outcome is not exam unsuccessful.
- If the previous case results in an exam unsuccessful outcome, or if no majority is obtained, the case shall be referred to the Associate Dean, Graduate Studies, who shall make the final determination of the outcome of the exam.

Those members of the examining committee who are voting members shall be clearly communicated to the candidate.

In programs where the comprehensive exam involves multiple components, a student may obtain different outcomes on each component of the exam. The comprehensive exam will be considered satisfied when the candidate has passed all components of the exam. The comprehensive exam will be considered failed if the candidate receives an exam unsuccessful outcome on any component. No component may be repeated more than once.

A student may seek reassessment of the exam evaluation only when the outcome is re-examination or exam unsuccessful based on the written element of the comprehensive exam. A student may not seek a reassessment of the oral component. A request for reassessment shall follow the process described in Policy 70 (reassessment challenge).

### **Academic Integrity and the Comprehensive Examination:**

The University considers academic integrity to be an integral part of all scholarship. Violations of academic integrity are handled under University Policy 71.

When the comprehensive exam involves a written submission of original work by the candidate completed in a non-invigilated setting, the student shall employ the University's plagiarism detection software leading up to the submission of the written document to the examining committee. The student is encouraged to discuss the reports generated from the software with their supervisor(s) to avoid academic integrity violations. The report generated related to the document submitted to the examining committee shall be included with the student's written element and shall be made available to the committee.

In cases where comprehensive exams involve the submission of a written document followed by an oral exam component, the following process shall be followed regarding suspected violations of academic integrity on the written element: the person identifying the possible violation shall communicate the concern in writing only to the Associate Dean, Graduate Studies in the student's home Faculty. The Associate Dean shall then assess the allegations. If the vetting cannot be completed prior to the scheduled date of the oral component of the exam, the oral exam shall be postponed, pending the outcome of the investigation. If the vetting is completed prior to the oral exam, and no violation is identified, then the exam can be held as scheduled.

When a change in comprehensive exam date is necessary, the Associate Dean Graduate Studies shall inform the candidate, the supervisor or co-supervisors and the Graduate Officer not later than one week prior to the date of the scheduled exam. If a violation is determined to have happened, the Associate Dean shall proceed under Policy 71.

If no violation is deemed to have occurred, the exam shall be rescheduled to the satisfaction of the student, the supervisors, and the examining committee. This rescheduling of the exam shall be considered a valid extenuating circumstance to extend the exam deadline.

If an academic integrity violation is believed to have occurred during the oral component of the comprehensive exam, the person suspecting the violation shall ask the Chair to pause the exam. The concerns identified shall be communicated to the Chair (only) who will then determine the course of action. If the Chair believes that uncertainty exists regarding the concerns identified, the Chair may determine that the exam shall continue and the potential academic integrity violation will be vetted after the completion of the exam. If the Chair believes that the suspected violation is likely to be valid or that the alleged occurrence precludes a fair evaluation of the candidate, the Chair shall then suspend the exam until a determination can be made as to whether an academic integrity violation has occurred.

In both cases, the suspected academic integrity violation shall be reported to and investigated by the Associate Dean, Graduate Studies in the student's home Faculty under Policy 71.

When the comprehensive exam includes the completion of a written exam in a controlled environment, suspected violations of academic integrity in these cases should be reported to the Associate Dean, Graduate Studies in the student's home Faculty.

### **Language Requirement:**

When a department considers that a candidate must have some level of competence in a particular foreign language or languages, the successful demonstration of this competence becomes a requirement for the degree.

### **Program of Study and Supervision:**

Candidates shall have their program of study and research approved by the department (or delegated committee) in which they are enrolled. In certain Faculties, a candidate will be responsible, upon entry to the program, to a supervisor who will be approved by the Associate Dean (Graduate Studies) of the Faculty. In other Faculties, the candidate will be responsible to a provisional supervisor to be approved by the departmental Graduate Studies Committee.

### **Advisory Committee:**

When a department wishes to appoint a supervisor (at the latest a month after the comprehensive), the departmental Graduate Officer shall consult with the candidate about an Advisory Committee and shall recommend to the Associate Dean (Graduate Studies) of the Faculty the composition of that three to five person Committee. In certain Faculties the Advisory Committee is appointed upon the passing of the comprehensive examination. This

Committee must consist of the supervisor(s) and at least one other faculty member from the department. The supervisor must be a regular member of the University faculty with Approved Doctoral Dissertation Supervisor (ADDS) status; or, when a supervisor has adjunct status, another on-campus professor must serve as co-supervisor. The Associate Dean (Graduate Studies) of the Faculty has the authority to waive the co-supervision requirement on the recommendation of the department / school. Two other faculty members, one of whom may be external to the department or Faculty, may also participate in this Committee. In any event, the Advisory Committee must have a minimum of the supervisor and two other faculty members or a maximum of two supervisors and three other faculty members.

### **Ph.D Thesis Examination:**

The PhD thesis examination is the culmination of the candidate's research program. It exposes the candidate's work to scholarly criticism by members of the University and gives him or her the opportunity to defend it.

All PhD candidates must successfully present and defend their thesis according to the procedures outlined in the Graduate Thesis Regulations.

### **Recommendation: Awarding of the Degree:**

On the basis of the Ph.D Thesis Examining Committee's report and its own records of candidates' progress in their assigned program of study, the Associate Dean (Graduate Studies) of the Faculty, or a committee specifically appointed by a faculty for this purpose, decides whether candidates have fulfilled the requirements for the Ph.D degree. If the decision is that they have, he or she forwards the supporting documentation to the Associate Vice-President, Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs with the request that he or she recommend to Senate that the degree be awarded. The Associate Vice-President, Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs examines this request in light of the report from the Chair of the thesis examination. If the Associate Vice-President, Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs has any reason to feel that the acceptance of the thesis is open to dispute, the Associate Vice-President will take the matter before the Associate Deans (Graduate Studies) for advice or, if necessary, to the Senate Graduate and Research Council, which is specifically given authority to decide in such cases.

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### **Thesis Submission:**

When the thesis is accepted by the department and Faculty, and all other requirements for the degree have been met, the student must provide the University with an electronic copy of their approved thesis as a final University degree requirement. Theses must be prepared and submitted as outlined on the Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs thesis submission page.