**Criteria of assessment for research awards**

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| **Domains** | | **Level M** | | **MPhil** | | **PhD** | |
| **Organisation & Planning** | | Ability to set negotiate & meet own objectives & deadlines to identified standards & involving the sensitive organisation & management of others | | Ability to set negotiate & meet own objectives & deadlines in a wide variety of contexts, over extended periods of time with a high level of autonomy & involving the sensitive & ethical organisation & management of others from a wide range of cultural/social/political backgrounds & contexts | | | |
| **Communication** | | Ability to select appropriate styles & modes of communication for complex tasks & purposes | | Able to communicate effectively in the full range of formal styles appropriate to & consistent with research in the chosen cognate area, for the production & defence of extended academic theses & for a wide range of presentation & publishing goals & targets | | | |
| **Group/ Interpersonal** | | Ability to interact sympathetically & ethically with individuals & groups, in varied settings, to achieve a major research task | | Able to interact sympathetically & ethically with individuals & groups from a wide range of cultural/social/political backgrounds in varied settings over extended & intensive periods of time with accurate notions of the precise impact of themselves on the settings in which they are operating | | | |
|  | |  | |  | | Ability to develop ways of coping/operating in novel settings with novel group/groupings | |
|  | |  | | Able to clearly delineate, negotiate & subscribe to agreed parameters & limits of responsibility in group/team settings & ventures | | | |
| **Information/ Data Collection** | | Ability to devise valid & reliable methods & instruments for data & information collection in relation to an extended piece of research | | Ability to carry out a full literature search & identify sources relevant to the field of research | | Ability to carry out a complete search, critical review & appraisal of all literature & primary sources of relevance to the research study | |
|  | |  | | Ability to make reasoned judgements regarding the appropriateness of a range of typologies of methods & instruments for data/information collection | | | |
|  | |  | | Able to adapt & apply methods & instruments appropriately to novel situations/contexts with due concern for matters of reliability & validity | | Able to devise & design novel methods & instruments for application in novel situations &/or contexts with a clear & critical perspective on the levels of reliability & validity achieved | |
| **Theory & Principles** | | Knowledge & understanding of a range of subject-specific advanced & contemporary theory, & of strategies & methodologies for investigation/ solution of professionally orientated research problems | | Knowledge & understanding of the range of subject-specific contemporary theory & of appropriate methods & strategies for investigation & solution of identified issues/problems | | Knowledge & understanding of theory, methods & strategies in the specific & in related fields of study, with a clearly articulated contextualisation of this study within its wider subject environment | |
| **Domains** | **Level M** | | **MPhil** | | **PhD** | |
| **Application & Reflection** | Analyses problems objectively using the main theoretical perspectives of the cognate area & the appropriate research methods & strategies with appropriate & rational sensitivity to the opinions & views of others | | Analyses problems objectively using the main theoretical perspectives of the field of study & appropriate methods & strategies, with appropriate & rational sensitivity to the opinions & views of others | | Analyses problems objectively using critically evaluated novel (or extended) theoretical perspectives from this (or related) fields of study, with rational sensitivity to, awareness of & allowance for effects on the opinions/views/feelings of all others involved | |
| **Application & Reflection** | Applies theories, methodology & strategies in rational and valid ways, demonstrating empirical/experimental rigour in | | Applies knowledge, theory, methodology & strategies in rational & valid ways, demonstrating experimental/research rigour in identifying solutions to complex & significant problems | | | |
|  | identifying solutions to complex & significant problems. Reflects both extensively/objectively on methods, process, outcomes | | Reflects objectively, particularly on the methods, the process & the outcomes of the study | | Reflects extensively & critically on all aspects - knowledge, theory, methods, process, outcomes - of the study & on the implications for the wider context within which the study is located | |
| **Synthesis & Evaluation** | Critically evaluates outcomes & relates them to existing knowledge structures & | | Critically evaluates outcomes & relates them to existing knowledge structures, theoretical perspectives & methodologies suggesting further topics for research | | | |
|  | methodologies. Reviews validity of theoretical perspectives, methods & strategies applied | |  | | Reviews & reappraises knowledge & the validity of theoretical perspectives & methodology in the wider context & proposes areas for research that will further explore these & other related fundamental issues | |
| **Creativity** | Identifies modifications to, & impact on, existing knowledge | | Displays originality &/or novelty in some (MPhil)/most (PhD) of the following: | | | |
|  | structures/theoretical frameworks. Proposes new areas for investigation/new problems/new methodological approaches | | • Application of different existing methods/ instruments to known area of study  • Transfer of existing methods/instruments to a different/related context  • Development &/or extension of existing knowledge & theoretical perspectives  • Application of existing research approaches to new populations  • New attempts to corroborate earlier work  • Identifies implications for existing theory & knowledge structures  • Identifies new areas for investigation | | • Topic/focus of study  • Development & application of new methods/instruments for investigation  • Application of existing instruments/methods to new/original contexts  • Development of new knowledge &/or theoretical insights  • New attempts to critically question & re-examine earlier research work  • Critically examines the implications of the outcomes & proposes new theoretical perspectives & knowledge structures  • Opens up new areas for fundamental & significant research | |

(Table taken from Leeds Beckett Taxonomy)  
Reference should also be made to the QAA Framework of Higher Education Qualifications:

**Extract from the ‘Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland’ – August 2008 “Descriptor for higher education qualification at level 7: Masters Degree”.**

### 1.1.1 Descriptor for a higher education qualification at level 7: Masters degree

The descriptor provided for this level of the framework is for any Masters degree which should meet the descriptor in full. This qualification descriptor can also be used as a reference point for other level 7 qualifications, including postgraduate certificates and postgraduate diplomas.

#### **1.1.1.1 Masters degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:**

* a systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice
* a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship
* originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline
* conceptual understanding that enables the student:
  + to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline
  + to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses.

#### **1.1.1.2 Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:**

#### **1.1.1.3 deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences**

* demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level
* continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level.

And holders will have:

* the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:
  + the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility
  + decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations
  + the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development.

Education Qualifications (extract below).

39 Much of the study undertaken for Masters degrees will have been at, or informed by, the forefront of an academic or professional discipline. Students will have shown originality in the application of knowledge, and they will understand how the boundaries of knowledge are advanced through research. They will be able to deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, and they will show originality in tackling and solving problems. They will have the qualities needed for employment in circumstances requiring sound judgement, personal responsibility and initiative in complex and unpredictable professional environments.

40 Masters degrees are awarded after completion of taught courses, programmes of research or a mixture of both. Longer, research-based programmes may lead to the degree of MPhil. The learning outcomes of most Masters degree courses are achieved on the basis of study equivalent to at least one full-time calendar year and are taken by graduates with a Bachelors degree with honours (or equivalent achievement).

41 Masters degrees are often distinguished from other qualifications at this level (for example, advanced short courses, which often form parts of continuing professional development programmes and lead to postgraduate certificates and/or postgraduate diplomas) by an increased intensity, complexity and density of study. Masters degrees - in comparison to postgraduate certificates and postgraduate diplomas - typically include planned intellectual progression that often includes a synoptic/research or scholarly activity.

42 Some Masters degrees, for example in science, engineering and mathematics, comprise an integrated programme of study spanning several levels where the outcomes are normally achieved through study equivalent to four full-time academic years. While the final outcomes of the qualifications themselves meet the expectations of the descriptor for a higher education qualification at level 7 in full, such qualifications are often termed 'integrated master's' as an acknowledgement of the additional period of study at lower levels (which typically meets the expectations of the descriptor for a higher education qualification at level 6).

43 First degrees in medicine, dentistry and veterinary science comprise an integrated programme of study and professional practice spanning several levels. While the final outcomes of the qualifications themselves typically meet the expectations of the descriptor for a higher education qualification at level 7, these qualifications may often retain, for historical reasons, titles of Bachelor of Medicine, and Bachelor of Surgery, Bachelor of Dental Surgery, Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine or Bachelor of Veterinary Science, and are abbreviated to MBChB or BM BS, BDS, BVetMed and BVSc respectively.

#### **1.1.1.4 Note**

The Master of Arts (MA) granted by the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge are not academic qualifications. The MA is normally granted, on application, to graduates of these universities with a Bachelor of Arts (BA). No further study or assessment is required, but the recipient may be required to pay a fee.

At the University of Oxford, the MA may be granted during or after the twenty-first term from matriculation and at the University of Cambridge, the MA may be granted six years after the end of the first term.