

Report of the review of higher degrees

University of Oxford

2016

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1 Background

1. At its meeting in week 8 of Trinity term 2015 Education Committee agreed that a review of the higher degrees offered by the University should be undertaken during 2015-16. The terms of reference for the review are provided in Annex A.
2. The degrees to be considered by the review were the:
 - Doctor of Divinity (DD)
 - Doctor of Civil Law (DCL) (also offered as BCL/DCL by accumulation)
 - Doctor of Letters (DLitt)
 - Doctor of Science (DSc)
 - Doctor of Music (DMus)
 - Doctor of Medicine (DM)
3. The abbreviated titles for these degrees given above are used throughout the rest of this report.
4. A review panel was established which included representation from the divisions, the Department for Continuing Education, the Proctors, Research Committee, and an external member. The composition and membership of the review panel are given in Annex B.
5. The following was undertaken in preparation for the review:
 - Documentary research to understand the historic origins and current sector practice in relation to higher degrees.
 - Further work on higher degrees at Oxford, including identifying the challenges in administration and management through the review of recent case-files and conversations with the Examinations and Assessments team.
 - Publication of a notice in the *Gazette* asking for contributions to the review. The panel received responses from three faculties, a division, and four individuals.
 - Interviews with eight individuals who had acted as judges for Oxford higher degrees.
6. The review panel met on 26 January 2016 and received a comprehensive briefing-paper and series of accompanying annexes.

2 Origins and history

7. Understanding the origins and history of the higher degrees is important to understanding their place today. This historical context was taken into consideration by the review panel and it is reported in brief below.
8. The higher degrees have a varied origin, but can be divided into three groups. The DD, DM, and DCL all have their origins in the medieval university of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Their subject areas relate to the original 'higher faculties' of Theology, Medicine, and Canon and Civil Law. The Doctor of Canon Law was abolished after the Reformation. The doctorates recognised advanced scholarship, but not necessarily original research. They originated at a time when the main award made was the Master of Arts, which recognised mastery over the seven liberal arts and gave the holder the right to teach in the University.
9. Music formed part of the early curriculum of the University. Exactly when the DMus was introduced is not known, but it certainly dates back to the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century. The Laudian Statutes of 1636 state that the degree was not examined but required a total of 12 years' musical practice and the public performance of a composition.
10. By comparison, the DSc and DLitt are relative newcomers to Oxford and they also have a slightly more complicated origin. They were introduced in 1900 following a century of change as British universities transformed from teaching institutions to those that also undertook advanced research. Germany had developed a strong university-based research culture and introduced the Doctor of Philosophy degree in the early nineteenth century (awarded after two or three years' study on production of a thesis, based on research and defended through a public *viva voce* examination). Students from Britain and the USA were attracted to Germany for the research environment and the PhD. The award was soon adopted amongst US universities, with the first PhD awarded in 1861 by Yale.
11. The first research doctorate in the UK was awarded by the University of London in 1860 in the form of the DSc. It was introduced following a recommendation by the Royal Commission on Scientific Instruction and Advancement of Science (the Devonshire Commission). Originally awarded on the basis of an examination, in 1881 it was reformed to be awarded on the basis of a dissertation. The DLitt was introduced in 1868 and similarly reformed in 1885. Cambridge adopted the DSc and DLitt along these lines in 1883.
12. Between 1850 and 1900 Oxford University engaged in a series of debates under the aegis of the Oxford Commission and various committees established by Council. The debates focused both on: whether the existing historic doctorates could be reformed to become tests of academic merit; and whether new doctorates should be introduced to cover the new subject areas which had been incorporated in the University. In 1900 the DSc and DLitt were finally agreed, but they were only open to graduates who had gained an MA, BSc, or BLitt. Candidates had to submit copies of papers or books containing an original contribution to the advancement of learning and science.

13. Seventeen years later, the University debated the reform of the DSc and DLitt with the proposal being to transform them into a supervised research degree which would be available to a wide range of students, including graduates of other Universities. This was in the context of a great demand for advanced study from students from the USA, the dominions and other British territories (now Commonwealth countries) and part of a UK-wide discussion about the introduction of research degrees. For Congregation's final debate on the proposals, an amendment was tabled proposing that the new degree be titled the 'Doctor of Philosophy' and that the older doctorates be retained as higher degrees above the new award. The amended proposals were passed 89 to 19 in favour. The first Doctor of Philosophy in Britain was awarded by Oxford in 1919.

3 Current sector practice

3.1 Terminology

14. At Oxford, the doctorates of the higher faculties (Medicine, Law, and Theology), Music, and the latterly introduced DSc and DLitt are generally referred to as the 'higher degrees'. Historically (and in some areas currently) at Oxford and currently in the wider UK higher education sector, this term is used to refer to postgraduate degrees in general; in particular, the term is now often used only to refer to postgraduate research degrees. In the wider UK higher education sector, the higher doctoral awards are referred to as 'higher doctorates'. The term 'higher doctorates' is used throughout the rest of this report.

<p>Recommendation 1: That the term 'higher degrees' should be replaced by the term 'higher doctorates' in University usage.</p>
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3.2 Context

15. Higher doctorates exist outside the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). 'Initial doctorates' are degrees awarded at level 8 of the FHEQ, whereas higher doctorates are specifically excluded from the framework. The UK Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE) has undertaken two periodic surveys of sector practice relating to higher doctorates (2008 and 2013). The 2008 survey adopted the following working definition of a higher doctorate:

A higher doctorate is an award that is at a level above the initial doctorate (e.g. the PhD) and that is typically gained not through a defined programme of study but rather by submission of a substantial body of research based work.

Therefore, where a PhD has come to indicate mastery of a narrow field (narrow in the sense of representing possibly three years of research study only) the Higher Doctorate may be seen as indicating command over a field of study and a sustained contribution to understanding within that field.

16. Of the 70 institutions that responded to the 2008 survey, 70% offered higher doctorate awards. However, the titling of awards varied, with some interchangeability between the titles used for initial doctorates and for higher doctorates. The Doctor of Medicine title was used predominantly for an initial doctorate. Eligibility for the awards was reserved for alumni, staff, or both. There were varying requirements for length of time

in post or since receipt of the lower award. The awards were generally unsupervised, or where there was some form of supervision this was in the nature of procedural guidance. Awards were made relatively infrequently with the majority of institutions making 3 or fewer awards in the last two years.

17. One of the most striking conclusions from the UKCGE 2008 report was of the:

general lack of consensus across the sector in terms of understanding the nature of Higher Doctorate awards, at least in terms of common nomenclature and their place in relation to other kinds and levels of doctorate. Where institutions claim certainty that their understanding in these respects is the commonly accepted one then evidence from elsewhere in this report indicates that certainty to be ill-founded. However, there are some interpretations that are virtually universal and which relate to these awards – notably perhaps: in the use of the DSc and DLitt awards, the way in which the eligibility categories are broadly cast ... and the need for a successful candidate to need to have made a substantial contribution to an intellectual field over a sustained period.

18. The report recommended that institutions might wish to adopt the following definition of higher doctorates:

A higher doctorate is an award that is at a level above the initial doctorate (e.g. the PhD) and that is typically gained not through a defined programme of study but rather by submission of a substantial body of research based work. It may be seen as indicating command over a field of study and a sustained contribution to understanding within that field.

19. To supplement the information provided by the UKCGE reports, the panel was provided with a survey of practice in the Russell Group that had been undertaken by officers on the basis of publically available information.
20. Out of the 23 institutions in the Russell Group, 20 currently offer higher doctorates. University College London and the London School of Economics have not offered the awards since achieving their own degree-awarding powers. Interestingly, Kings College London, which achieved degree-awarding powers in 2006, has suspended their award since 2014-15. Queen Mary University of London degree awarding powers are via the federal University of London which suspended the award of higher doctorates in 2001.
21. Officers also investigated whether the Doctor of Medicine award was offered as a higher doctorate or as an initial doctorate by Russell Group institutions. In all institutions where the award was offered, it was as an alternative to a traditional PhD, although in several cases it was available through a published work route.
22. Both in their historical origins, and in current sector practice, the consensus appears to be that higher doctorates have an unclear place within the awards made by UK higher education institutions. Originally, they were the only higher awards, but with the introduction of the PhD and the passage of time, their status and purpose have become uncertain. Although sector research shows there is general consensus

regarding a minimal definition of higher doctorates, the further detail of how and on what basis they should be awarded varies significantly.

4 The Doctor of Medicine

23. The DM is formally considered a 'higher doctorate' within the University's order of academic precedence and standing. However, in practice it now has much greater similarity with an initial doctorate as, for most candidates, it is a supervised degree, focusing on a particular piece of research, which is completed in a specified period of time, with regulations and criteria similar to the DPhil. Eligibility is restricted to those with a medical degree who have studied for at least part of that degree at Oxford.
24. During the latter part of the twentieth century, the DM was awarded on the basis of a 'dissertation, thesis, book, or papers' not exceeding 50,000 words, in addition to an oral examination. In 2002, the regulations were radically revised. They provided two distinct routes to the degree, based either on a supervised piece of research, or by exception, a series of publications. The latter required previous approval by the Medical Sciences Board after consideration of the candidate's seniority.
25. The criteria for the award as contained in the University's *Examination Regulations* for the DPhil and DM are very similar, with the only difference in the specific level of achievement being 'an original and substantial contribution' for the DM, rather than 'a significant and substantial contribution' for the DPhil.
26. Candidates are predominantly, and in recent years exclusively, taking the supervised degree route, and are likely to be doing so as an initial doctorate in support of their career aspirations within the medical profession. This reflects wider practice in the sector as seen from the UKGCE reports and the officer survey of the Russell Group, where for the majority of universities the DM is an initial doctorate equivalent to a PhD.
27. Although the DM remains a useful and widely recognised award, it has not retained its original status, and the evidence suggests that it no longer belongs in the category of higher doctorate.

Recommendation 2: That the DM should no longer be defined as a higher doctorate, and that the implications of this for University ceremonial and any other functions should be referred for consideration by the appropriate bodies.

28. The panel was aware that the Medical Sciences Division had begun the process of considering what initial research programme might be most suitable for early career clinicians. Such a programme might or might not retain the use of the title of 'Doctor of Medicine' for the resulting award. That matter is rightly within the remit of the Medical Sciences Division to explore and decide.
29. The DSc is currently awarded as a higher doctorate for candidates within the purview of the Medical Sciences Divisional Board. Other universities operate a specific higher doctorate title for the field, in the form of a Doctor of Medical Sciences (DMedSci). Although the possible value of a separately titled higher doctorate in the medical sciences was considered by the panel, particularly in the light of the consideration of the revised status of the Doctor of Medicine, the introduction of a new title was felt

unnecessary, given that those undertaking advanced medical research are scientists as well as clinicians. Within the context of later recommendations with regard to the DSc, the panel makes the following recommendation.

Recommendation 3: That the DSc should be retained as the sole title for higher doctorate awards within the fields of study covered by the Medical Sciences Division.

5 Place and purpose

30. With such an uncertain sense of purpose for these awards in current and historical context, the panel considered what purpose and value they might have for Oxford today. In order to do this, the panel explored where the higher doctorates might fit alongside the other forms of recognition available within academia and the profile of awards currently made.

5.1 Comparison with other forms of recognition

31. Once an individual has completed their initial doctorate, there are various forms of academic recognition available, partially or wholly related to their achievements in research. Within the University, the Recognition of Distinction exercise operates to confer the title of full professor. Applications are considered by a committee which takes into account research output alongside teaching and service contributions.
32. Outside the University, individuals may seek or be nominated for membership of various learned societies requiring varying levels of research achievement and determined through a range of mechanisms. Individuals may apply for or be nominated for research prizes or awards, which vary immensely in their criteria and process. And, of course, individuals have their research output assessed via the Research Excellence Framework process.
33. How the level of achievement expected of a higher doctorate fits with these other forms of recognition was not immediately obvious to the panel. The descriptions of the level of achievement required for all of the forms of recognition listed above use terminology similar to that currently used for higher doctorates. The panel therefore recognised that if higher doctorates were to be retained, a much clearer statement of the level of achievement required and how that fitted with other forms of academic recognition would be important, along with an understanding of a distinctive purpose for the awards.
34. The panel also considered how higher doctorates related to honorary doctorates, noting that the higher doctorates are currently formulated as an 'earned' degree, awarded after a form of examination, recognising specific research achievement(s) awarded to those who made an application, and the latter are a recognition of a potentially more varied contribution to society beyond academia.

5.2 Challenge of diversity

35. The panel considered the number of higher doctorates awarded, and in particular the demographic profile of recipients.

Table 1 – Number of higher doctorates awarded at the University of Oxford since 1923

Degree	Male	Female	Total	% of awards
DD	74	2	76	9.5
DCL	94	2	96	12.1
DLitt	196	23	219	27.5
DSc	354	23	377	47.4
DMus	27	1	28	3.5
Total	745	51	796	-

36. The profile of recipients is significantly skewed towards men, with 93.6% of recipients of higher doctorates being men. Given the period over which the awards were made, this is not surprising, allowing for the balance of sexes among the senior levels of the academic profession, and it might be unlikely to shift for some time.
37. However, the panel noted that the current system of self-application might have contributed to the imbalance of recipients, with research indicating that men were more likely than women to seek recognition for their professional achievement.
38. An interesting piece of information would have been the age profile of recipients at the time of award but, as this is not directly recorded, it was not possible to examine this characteristic. Similarly, there is no data recorded with regard to ethnicity or disability.

Recommendation 4: That standard questions regarding age, ethnicity, and disability should be added to the application form to enable monitoring of key protected characteristics.

6 The future of higher doctorates

39. Alongside the definitional challenge that higher doctorates presented, the panel considered the current administrative challenge and burden that the awards as currently constituted placed on both academic and administrative colleagues and the financial and opportunity cost to the University that this represented. The different administrative challenges are explored and addressed in detail within the context of the proposals put forward for the future of the awards, below.
40. However, in considering whether higher doctorates should have a future at Oxford the panel put aside the administrative considerations, and focused on what purpose these degrees might serve in the twenty-first century for the University, asking the question ‘If we didn’t have them, would we invent them and why?’
41. The case for retaining the higher doctorates was not initially felt to be strong, given the information and evidence presented, and the panel seriously considered whether higher doctorates should be abolished entirely, or be reduced to those which had clear subject-level support (DD and DMus).
42. The panel also considered whether the awards could be re-purposed entirely, removing any element of examined degree but retaining an element of an ‘earned’ degree. The panel considered the possibility of transforming them into a system of

departmentally nominated awards. These could share similarities with honorary degrees but with a focus solely on recognising and celebrating outstanding achievement in academic research rather than the wider achievement required in the honorary award criteria.

43. In considering all the information and the potential alternatives identified, the panel agreed that the higher doctorates should be retained as earned awards of the University and that their fundamental purpose is to recognise excellence in academic scholarship. With careful framing of the key element of the award – the level of achievement required – it was felt that the higher doctorates still had a purpose for the University as the highest level of award, and had value for the individual recipient. With some slight changes to the system of award and administration, higher doctorates had potential value for the University as a means of recognition and reward. To withdraw higher doctorates from use was felt to be removing a historic entitlement of graduates to seek recognition of their outstanding scholarship beyond the DPhil.
44. The awards could be used to recognise the excellence achievable amongst our graduates no matter how near to or far from Oxford they are and to promote scholarship of the highest distinction that makes a sustained contribution to excellence in scholarship.

Recommendation 5: That the higher doctorates should be retained as earned awards of the University whose fundamental purpose is to recognise excellence in academic scholarship.

45. To achieve this purpose, the awards require comprehensive reform in terms of regulation, documentation, and administration.
46. The panel noted the response from the Faculty of Law, which indicated that it was not committed to the retention of the DCL. However, the panel agreed that given the recommendation to retain the higher doctorates there was not a strong case for withdrawing a particular award title, and would request that the Faculty reflect further on its position in the context of this report's recommendations.

7 Reforming the higher doctorates

7.1 Regulatory framework

47. The entries in the *Examination Regulations* constitute the foundation of the University's definition and administration of the higher doctorates. Fundamental reform of these regulations is essential to refashion and clarify the framework for the awards in terms of who is eligible to apply for them, what standard of achievement is required for their award, who is responsible for administering them, how are they judged, and whether candidates have the right of appeal.
48. Currently, each award operates under its own separate regulations, except for the DSc and DLitt which have a single entry. There are commonalities between the different regulations, but there are also differences which do not appear to have a logical basis and have probably arisen over the course of time. The panel agreed that all higher

doctorates should operate to the same standard (with the necessary exception in relation to the award criteria of the DMus) and to the same operational framework.

Recommendation 6: There should be a single and unified set of regulations for all the higher doctorates with the exception that the Doctor of Music would retain its own award criteria.

7.1.1 Eligibility criteria

49. The only formal eligibility criteria for the higher doctorates are the requirements to hold the correct Oxford degree (which includes those who have had their degree from Cambridge or Dublin incorporated or have received an MA by decree or special resolution) and to have passed a certain number of terms since matriculation. Candidates are not required to have an initial doctorate. Individual awards vary as to which previous degrees are acceptable and to the length of time required to have passed since matriculation – there does not appear to be an obvious rationale for this variation. For example, graduates of the MSt or MPhil are not eligible to apply for any higher doctorates except the DCL and BCL/DCL by accumulation.
50. The 2008 UKCGE survey identified that one of the common underlying criteria for many institutions awarding higher doctorates is a connection with the University – with the candidate either being an alumnus or a current staff member – with a possible underlying sense of purpose in ‘honouring their own’. Oxford is unusual in not opening the award up to staff, irrespective of whether they hold an Oxford degree.
51. There is also no formal eligibility requirement in terms of stage in career (with the exception of the DM published-work route). From anecdotal evidence, the actual career stage of applicants seems to vary between subjects, with some more likely to make awards to those in earlier/mid-career, with others more firmly focussed on the latter end of career.
52. The panel discussed the implication from the current eligibility criteria that the awards related in some way to recognition ‘of our own’, and achievement by individuals with some connection to Oxford.
53. The panel considered various options for potentially restricting eligibility for the awards whilst retaining this element of ‘recognising our own’. For example, the awards could only be made available:
 - to graduates who had never worked at Oxford, so that they would represent recognition of ‘external’ research excellence, whilst retaining some connection to the University;
 - to current staff, so focusing on ‘internal’ research excellence.
54. But in the light of the broad purpose agreed for the award, and the desire to retain eligibility for graduates as is currently the case, the panel agreed that a simplification and harmonisation of eligibility would be an appropriate change.
55. It was agreed that the awards should be available to all current senior staff (those eligible for membership of Congregation) irrespective of whether they were graduates

or had received an MA by other means and to all graduates, irrespective of their degree.

Recommendation 7: That all current members of Congregation and graduates of the University should be eligible to apply for a higher doctorate.

56. The regulations currently include a variety of restrictions relating to the period of time which must elapse since matriculation before an individual may apply for a higher doctorate. This was felt to be an unnecessary complication and that the proposed clarified award criteria would be able to fulfil the function of restricting candidature to those of appropriate standing rather than setting an arbitrary time limit.

7.1.2 Award criteria

57. The current award criteria in the *Examination Regulations* for the DSc, DLitt, DCL, and DD contain essentially the same very brief criteria for award (the DMus is dealt with separately in paragraphs 64 to 65 below). Judges are required to decide if the evidence submitted amounts to:

An original contribution to the advancement of knowledge of such substance and distinction as to give the candidate an authoritative status in some branch or branches of learning.

58. From evidence presented to the panel, it was clear that these broadly worded criteria are difficult to operate, giving rise to one of the principal problems besetting the awards i.e. very different judgements between subject areas, and even significantly different outcomes for judgements within the same subject area. The lack of clarity about the criteria can lead to significant disappointment and frustration on the part of both candidates and judges.

59. Some subject areas have local guidance in place: some local guidance has been approved by Education Committee, such as that operated by the MPLS Division; some, operating at a local level, has not been formally approved. Although the existence of such local guidance shows an attempt by various responsible bodies to improve on the limited guidance provided by the regulations, the existence of varying, and to a certain extent 'below the radar', local guidance is a less than ideal situation, particularly where it relates to the same award in different faculties. In any case, the additional guidance or local 'gloss' on criteria can only be taken as a guide to candidates and judges; it does not have the weight of regulation.

60. The panel agreed that a much more extensive set of criteria for the award should be incorporated into regulation; these criteria should capture the level of achievement required for all higher doctorates. Extra-regulatory local guidance could then be restricted to the breadth, the format of submission appropriate to the subject area, and other agreed administrative variations (see paragraphs 69 to 70 below).

61. The panel agreed that the level of achievement for a higher doctorate should be clearly set at a high bar, above what would be expected of a titular professorship, and more in keeping with the perceived level of achievement required for membership of exclusive learned societies such as the Royal Society and the British Academy. A much more

tightly worded set of award criteria should help to combat the variations in judgements within and between subject areas. Judges should be left in no doubt as to the level of excellence in academic scholarship required for the award.

62. In formulating the wording, the panel took into account the current criteria and the local 'gloss' in use by MPLS. That division's criteria also seek to incorporate new aspects that the panel identified, such as the need for the research to be both 'sustained' and 'current' and the need for the work to be of 'global reach and international importance'; the criteria also define 'authoritative'.

Recommendation 8: The award criteria for the higher doctorates (excluding the DMus) should be revised as follows:

'Whether the evidence submitted demonstrates excellence in academic scholarship and is:

- of the absolute highest quality**
- substantial in scale and in the contribution it has made to knowledge**
- sustained over time and showing current and continued contribution to scholarship**
- authoritative, being able to demonstrate impact on the work of others**
- of global reach and international importance within the field**
- of such breadth or covering such branches of knowledge appropriate to the field and in line with disciplinary norms and expectations.'**

63. The clear, high bar set by the award criteria is intended to help judges in their role, but also to ensure that any potential applicants are able fully to assess their own potential for the award. This would reduce applications being submitted that fall far below the expected standard whose rejection causes great frustration and disappointment to the candidate, judges, and colleagues supporting the examination process.

7.1.3. Award criteria for the Doctor of Music

64. The Doctor of Music stands apart from the other higher doctorates as it relates to achievement in composition rather than research; candidates seeking recognition for contribution to musicology are able to apply for a DLitt. Prior to 2004, the regulations for the Doctor of Music were particularly sparse. In 2004, the regulations were reformed, including changes to the award criteria. The current award criteria contained within the regulations are as follows:

The portfolio shall normally consist of between five and seven compositions which, taken together, demonstrate originality and high level of technical and aesthetic distinction, significantly in advance of what is required for a D.Phil. in composition. Each portfolio shall include a copy of any recordings of the compositions. The portfolio should demonstrate an ability to handle varied musical forces and large-scale structures. Where the composer is predominantly concerned with acoustic instrumental music, there should be evidence of extended structures such as symphonic work and carefully wrought music such as that associated with the string

quartet medium, amongst contrasting work. Where the composer has concentrated on the development of other areas, such as mixed media, studio, ethnic or community approaches, the work should be of comparable quality in its field.

65. Given the particular nature of the award, the panel recognised the need to retain specific award criteria for the DMus.

Recommendation 9: That the Faculty of Music should be invited to propose a revised form of the award criteria for the DMus, to be consistent in style with that recommended for the other higher doctorates, in order to incorporate them in the proposed single entry in the *Examination Regulations*, whilst retaining the necessary distinction required by the particular character of the award.

7.2 Administrative framework

66. Central oversight of the process for the award of higher doctorates is currently the responsibility of the Examinations and Assessments team within Student Administration and Services. However, a significant part of the process is actually carried out within the relevant Division or Faculty, and formal responsibility for the process rests with the Faculty or Divisional Board named in the relevant *Examination Regulations*.
67. In practice, this means that in MSD, MPLS, and SSD oversight is carried out at divisional level, with subject expertise input as needed from the relevant departments and faculties. In the Humanities Division, in accordance with the regulations, responsibility lies with the individual Faculties.
68. The panel did not agree that imposing standardisation of administrative structures was necessary, provided that the aspects of the process that were determined at local level were clearly recorded in local guidance and approved on behalf of Education Committee. Irrespective of whether responsibility lies with the division, departments and faculties will still need to contribute to the process as subject experts, particularly in the identification of judges.

Recommendation 10: The divisions, working with their departments and faculties, should decide where overall responsibility for managing the process of higher doctorates within the division should rest, that is whether the division or the departments and faculties should be the 'responsible body'.

7.2.1 Local guidance

69. As already noted, there are at present various forms of local guidance; some of this has been approved by Education Committee; some exists within Faculty standing orders but has not received Education Committee endorsement.
70. Although a much more detailed framework is intended to be set in the revised regulations, certain specifications should rightly differ between responsible bodies as appropriate. These aspects are outlined further below, but include:
- The nature and operation of the screening process (see paragraphs 88 to 95 below)
 - The composition of the full submission (see paragraphs 96 to 99 below)

- Who receives the judges' reports and confirms the final decision (see paragraphs 107 to 108 below)

Recommendation 11: Local guidance should be produced by responsible bodies and approved and monitored on behalf of Education Committee.

7.2.2 University guidance

71. There is currently no University guidance other than that contained in the *Examination Regulations*. In addition to the new regulations, there will need to be University guidance to sit alongside the regulations and to provide assistance to responsible bodies in carrying out their duties. Areas identified for University guidance include the nomination and appointment of judges, although further areas may be identified as the documentation is developed.

Recommendation 12: University guidance should be produced to complement the regulations.

7.3 Application

7.3.3 Information for potential applicants

72. There is no general information on higher doctorates currently provided on the University website. The only publically available information is contained in the relevant entries in the *Examination Regulations*.
73. It is unclear how the majority of applicants become aware of the existence of the awards or why they choose to apply for one. There have been some instances of 'domino applications', where those asked to judge candidates' submissions later go on to apply for the award themselves.
74. For all other forms of award that the University makes, it has clear policies relating to the quality of information that must be available to applicants. At present, this approach has not been applied to the higher doctorates. To fulfil the identified purpose of the awards, it will be necessary to ensure that there is clear, easily locatable information so that the existence of the awards becomes more widely known.

Recommendation 13: That a new set of webpages should be established to inform potential applicants as to the nature and requirements of the higher doctorates and to host key documents such as the local and University guidance and application materials.

7.3.4 Information for applicants

75. For the majority of applicants, the only information currently provided is through the wording of the *Examination Regulations*. Informal advice from those handling applications in the Examinations and Assessments team or from the relevant Faculty or Division can supplement this, but for most applicants what they should submit and how are left entirely up to them.
76. Candidates for the DSc in subjects overseen by the MPLS Division are provided with a much more comprehensive application pack. The panel agreed that the materials

provided by MPLS should be developed and adapted into an application pack for candidates for all higher doctorates, including additional guidance on the process and the universal requirements for the format of a screening submission.

Recommendation 14: That a new application pack should be developed for all higher doctorates, drawing on that currently used by MPLS for the DSc.

77. The current regulations require candidates to submit a 'a certificate, signed by some officer of, or some person deputed by, the college to which the candidate belongs, showing that his application has the approval of the college'. In most recent cases, this has taken the form of a very simple statement that the candidate holds the status necessary to apply; however, it has on occasion taken the form of a personal endorsement. The panel agreed that it was unnecessary to retain this requirement and that a statement from the college would only be procured by the Examinations and Assessments team where it is necessary to confirm the candidate's status as a graduate when the application is made on that basis.

7.3.5 Application process

78. As noted above in paragraph 42 above the panel considered restricting access to the higher doctorates through a process of nomination by departments and faculties. However, with the purpose identified for the awards, it was felt that it was not appropriate to restrict them in this way and that they should remain accessible through a process of open application.
79. However, the panel agreed that in addition to an open application there could be some room for departments and faculties to invite individuals whose work they felt represented the excellence in academic scholarship the awards were designed to recognise to apply. This could be used as a way to encourage applications from those groups currently under-represented in the award of higher doctorates – (particularly women, and BME candidates), or to recognise areas of scholarship that are felt to be insufficiently represented in the academy.
80. Departments and faculties might wish to offer to cover the application fee of a candidate they have invited to apply, in order further to encourage them to do so. However, an invitation to apply could only be made with the clear caveat that it did not guarantee that the candidate would be successful.
81. Colleges may also wish to encourage their current members or alumni to apply. In that case, they may also wish to pay the application fee on their behalf.

Recommendation 15: That applications should continue to be invited on an open basis, but that departments and faculties, and colleges might wish to invite an application from a specific candidate.

82. The Department for Continuing Education currently has no responsibility for higher doctorates. Since the department covers such a wide range of subject areas, it is proposed that should it wish to invite a candidate to apply, it would work with the relevant responsible body.

7.3.6 Application cycle

83. Under the present arrangements, an application may be submitted at any time for any subject area. One of the challenges this presents, due to the low number of applications, is that there may be many months, if not years, between an application in any given subject area. That, combined with the limited regulatory and local framework, means that the institutional memory as to how most effectively and efficiently to deal with applications is often lost, leading to delays and difficulties.
84. The panel considered whether some form of cycle or gathered-field approach to applications might help support more effective and targeted administration, similar to applications to courses and programmes at the University that are handled on a cyclical basis to recognised deadlines. However, an annual cycle, for what is still likely to remain a small number of applications, was not felt to be necessary and so different patterns of cycle were considered – biennial, by a single division each year and in rotation, or by a selection of faculties and departments across divisions each year.
85. The panel agreed that a cycle with applications under the purview of a single division each academic year would allow the concentration of resources from the Examinations and Assessments team to support the responsible body and assist planning for the local resources to be allocated for the exercise that year.
86. The cycle would be advertised using the planned website and the opportunity could be promoted by individual divisions, departments, and faculties in the months preceding the opening of the relevant application period.
87. The details of how the process would take place over the year will need to be worked out and documented in the University-level guidance. However, it is envisaged that applications might be received during Michaelmas, screened by the middle of Hilary term to enable them to go out to judges, and be received back by the end of Trinity term, allowing an approximately six-month process from application deadline to final decision.

Recommendation 16: That applications should be submitted during a specified period, operated on a cyclical basis, with applications across a single division to be considered in one academic year, and rotating through the divisions on a four-yearly basis.

7.3.7 Screening

88. With the exception of the DMus that allows candidates to seek advice from the Chair of the Faculty Board, the current *Examination Regulations* do not allow for a screening process for applications. Different responsible bodies have taken varying approaches to this matter over time (even for the same degree), with some operating no pre-application process, some operating it on a case-by-case basis, some making an initial assessment based on minimal information, and some undertaking a process similar to a full assessment or requiring initial views of external referees. There is also significant variation in how pre-applications are signed off.

89. The use of screening can also significantly extend the length of the process. Applicants sometimes prepare and submit substantial paperwork and pay their fee, not realising they will undergo subsequent pre-application screening.
90. As screening is an extra-regulatory process, its outcomes can only be provided as advice to the candidate and cannot prevent the pursuit of a full assessment for the award – even where the pre-application process has mirrored the full process.
91. The panel agreed that a formal screening process should be provided for in the regulations, but the detail of its operation should be up to each responsible body, provided that it is clearly defined and transparent; this should be included in the local guidance approved by Education Committee. The regulations should provide for the screening process to be definitive; that is, if a candidate is unsuccessful at the screening phase, progression to full submission is not permitted.
92. If it is determined in some divisions that responsibility for screening should lie at department or faculty level, it should involve an 'internal external' from another department or faculty, to ensure parity of decision-making across the division.
93. The submission for screening should enable the responsible body to make an informed decision as to whether there is a *prima facie* case to proceed with full consideration of the award; this should neither require the full consideration of the works intended to be submitted, nor rely solely on more high-level information such as a CV.
94. Screening would take place as a gathered-field exercise, allowing comparison between applications and a clearer benchmarking of the level required. There would be no quota for the maximum number of candidates that could be put forward from screening, so that all, some, or none of the candidates might be put forward for full consideration by the judges. Candidates that applied directly and those that had applied as result of an invitation from the faculty or department or college would be screened as a single pool and to the same standard.
95. The panel agreed that the screening submission would be most useful if it required the candidate to make a case as to how they met the requirements of the award, and included other key information, whilst remaining manageable in length and not involving submission of full publications.

Recommendation 17: That a screening application process should be incorporated into the regulations, with the details to be set by each responsible body in their local guidance.

Recommendation 18: That applicants should submit for screening:

- An application form

- A document of no more than 10 pages of A4 (minimum 11pt, single spaced) to include a statement as to how they meet the criteria for the award, a CV, and a list of key/representative publications

- Any individuals they would like to see excluded from the pool of judges on grounds of conflict of interest, with grounds to be explained.

7.3.8 Submission

96. The current regulations vary in detail, but in general each award requires the applicant to submit a portfolio of their published work – there is no requirement to submit any further information, or any guidance as to the composition of the submission (in some areas this is provided in local guidance). The regulations also require that at least one year has passed since the publication of any item (except for the DCL, where this requirement is absent). As might be expected, quite different submission requirements are in place for the DMus, since the award relates to composition rather than research.
97. With the exception of the DMus, which specifically excludes material submitted for other degrees, the current regulations require only that candidates declare work that has been considered for other degrees. They do not state whether this work is to be excluded, or if not, how its submission for another award should be taken into account by the judges. Candidates for all awards (except the DMus) are required to state their contribution to items produced in collaboration. The panel agreed that material submitted for other degrees should be excluded from consideration.
98. The panel agreed that, given the very different patterns and expectations regarding publication in different academic fields, the responsible bodies should determine the appropriate form of the submission of published works in their subject area(s).
99. The panel agreed that the published works should be added to the statement, CV, and list of publications submitted in pre-screening for consideration by the judges. Publications could be submitted as hard-copy or electronic links, as decided by the responsible body in their local guidance. All physical copies should be returned to candidates.

Recommendation 19: That for all higher doctorates, work submitted for other degrees should be excluded from consideration.

Recommendation 20: That responsible bodies should determine the nature of the submission in terms of the extent and form of publications as appropriate to the conventions of the field. This should form part of the approved local guidance.

7.4 Judges

100. For the majority of the higher doctorates, the regulations do not specify whether judges should be internal or external; most specify two judges, although the DSc/DLitt regulations do not. There is also no specification that for an internal candidate both judges should be external. The DMus requires two external judges. Nominations come from the responsible body, but it is not clear how this works in practice and in many cases those responsible are understandably unclear about how to undertake the process.
101. One of the most challenging aspects of administering higher doctorates is finding judges who are willing and able to act. Prospective judges have declined because they feel that they know the applicant too well to be impartial, that in such a small field it

would be impossible to remain anonymous, or that they are too distant from the field. Many also cite workload pressures, given the amount of material to be considered.

102. There are currently no guidelines relating to assessing actual or potential conflicts of interest – for example, what current or previous professional relationship the judge has to the applicant. Applicants are not currently given the opportunity to suggest that certain individuals be excluded from the pool of judges (provision for which is incorporated in recommendation 18).

Recommendation 21: That the University guidance to responsible bodies should include guidance on managing conflicts of interest in the appointment of judges.

103. Although Oxford undertakes teaching and research across a wide range of areas, within those or alongside them are academic areas not covered by our internal expertise. This can make finding a suitable internal judge problematic. Some applications also span subject areas with differing procedures for the same degree, leading to further challenges and delays.
104. The current regulations do not contain any easy caveat to use to refuse an application if it is outside the University's expertise or if it is unable to find external judges willing to act. This is in contrast with the Recognition of Distinction exercise where, if the independent evaluators cannot be found within the required timescale, the application is suspended.

Recommendation 22: That an initial panel of two judges should be appointed by the responsible body. This should normally be an internal judge and an external judge for an external candidate (although two externals could be used if no suitable internal is available) and two external judges if the applicant is a current member of staff.

Recommendation 23: That the University guidance should include the provision to terminate an application if suitable judges cannot be found within a reasonable period of time. In this case, the applicant's full fee should be refunded.

105. Judges are not currently provided with any guidance on the format that their report should take. Reports have ranged from a single, long paragraph to a twelve-page 'literature review'-style document. With the exception of the DMus, judges are not required to produce a joint judgement or report, although in many recent cases judges have submitted a single joint report.
106. The panel noted the requirement for independent judgement demonstrated by the production of individual reports and felt that this should be the default approach, with judges producing their own independent assessment as to whether the candidate has met the required standard.

Recommendation 24: That each judge should produce an independent report assessing whether the candidate's submission has met the award criteria.

7.5 Outcome

107. At present, practice varies with regard to how the final decision is signed off. Although formally the responsibility rests with the relevant divisional or faculty or divisional board, in reality it varies as to whether this is done at a meeting of the Board or by Chair's action. The panel agreed that the judges' reports should be considered at a divisional or faculty board and a final outcome decision should be made by that body.
108. If the judges both recommend the award, the outcome would be the award of the higher doctorate. If both judges did not recommend the award, the outcome would be that the candidate was unsuccessful. In the case of differential recommendations between the two judges, a third judge would be identified and asked to produce a report (without knowledge of the previous judgements).

Recommendation 25: That the judges' reports should be received and considered by the divisional or faculty board directly.

Recommendation 26: That in the event of two conflicting judges' reports, a third judge should be appointed.

Recommendation 27: That unsuccessful candidates should be able to re-apply in the next application cycle.

7.5.1 Publicity

109. At present, the award of a higher doctorate is not publicised beyond publication of the result in the *Gazette* and the *University Calendar*. In line with the purpose of the award in recognising excellence in academic scholarship, it would seem appropriate for the recipients of higher doctorates to be publicised on the University website.

7.5.2 Complaints and appeals

110. Formal and informal complaints have arisen relating to higher doctorates in recent years. Outcomes have been disputed by candidates, as has the choice of judges. Another serious concern and the cause of frequent complaint, is that the process for adjudication takes far too long, for the reasons highlighted above.
111. As candidates are not students, they do not therefore fall within the Proctors' procedures for complaints and appeals. The Proctors have considered complaints under their general duty to University members. This route is not intended to be used for individual complaints but as one for concerns to be raised regarding procedural and other issues.
112. The panel was mindful that these are not examined degrees in the same way as other awards and, as the candidates are not students, they do not have a right of complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). Some form of appeal and complaints mechanism was thought to be desirable, and the panel agreed that an appeal or complaint to Education Committee would be appropriate, given the level of decision-making at divisional or faculty board and the proposals for oversight of the awards (see paragraphs 119 to 120 below).

Recommendation 28: That a candidate should have a right to appeal against the outcome on procedural grounds to Education Committee.

7.5.3 Fees

113. In Michaelmas term 2013, Education Committee and Planning and Resource Allocation Committee agreed the following:
- an increase in the fee payable to judges from £199 in 2013/14 to £500 in 2014/15 [*fee uplifted to £505 for 2015/16*];
 - an increase in the fee payable by candidates for higher doctorates from £710 in 2013/14 to £1,050 in 2014/15 [*fee uplifted to £1,080 for 2015/16*].
114. The increase in judges' fees was felt to be advisable as recognition of the amount of time and effort required by judges and to bring it more in line with payments for other examinations, including for doctoral theses or for those acting as an external examiner.
115. With regard to the applicant's fee, the Officers' Subgroup of Joint Fees and Student Support Advisory Group (JFSSAG) originally proposed increasing the fee to £1,800 (which was based on meeting the new, higher judges' fees and a more significant contribution to the estimated administrative cost). After further deliberation, this was felt to be too large an uplift and that a lower fee of £1,050, covering the judges' fees and making a notional contribution, to administration was proposed. It was agreed that the fee be reviewed again in two years' time.
116. The panel considered the current level of fee in comparison to the range of fees currently charged across the sector, and in relation to the original recommendation to JFSSAG. The need for the fee to cover adequate compensation for the judges and to contribute or ideally to cover the administrative cost to the University was considered, along with the potential role of a higher fee in dissuading frivolous applications. Given that two years has elapsed since the original recommendation, the panel felt in the position to give consideration to an uplift in the fee to get close to a position in which judges' fees and a portion of administrative costs are covered.
117. The panel also noted the common practice across the sector of requiring either full payment up front, including a non-refundable deposit, or a staged payment, including a non-refundable initial payment, followed by full payment on successful completion of the *prima facie* phase. The panel agreed that the greatest dissuasion for frivolous applications would be the payment of a single up-front fee, but that the greater portion of this should be refunded should the application not proceed past the screening process.
118. With regard to the judges' fees, the panel felt that a further uplift was justified, particularly given the feedback from judges on the amount of time required to produce the judgement report.

Recommendation 29: That the total applicant fee should be increased to £2,500; of which £250 would be a non-refundable deposit, but the remainder would be returned to a candidate who was not recommended to progress to full scrutiny after initial screening.

Recommendation 30: That the fee payable to judges should be increased to £750.

7.6 Institutional oversight

119. The oversight of higher doctorates does not clearly fall within the remit of any University committee as currently constituted; matters have been considered at Graduate Panel, but this does not comfortably sit alongside its other routine business.
120. However, the panel recognised the importance of having some University oversight of the regulations, documentation, process, and award of higher doctorates and that a specialist committee was warranted to carry out that function.

Recommendation 31: That a Higher Doctorates Subcommittee, reporting to Education Committee, should be established with appropriate representation from the responsible bodies and other interested parties such as the Proctors to:

- oversee the regulatory and administrative framework for the awards;
- monitor the demographic characteristics of candidates; and to
- approve local guidance on behalf of Education Committee. *[see recommendation 11]*

8 Implementation

121. If the recommendations of the panel are adopted, they necessitate wide-ranging changes in terms of regulation, process, and documentation. Given the problems currently experienced by administrative and academic colleagues trying to operate under the existing regulations, the panel agreed that it would be sensible to suspend applications for higher doctorates until the necessary changes to regulation, documentation, and process had been made.

Recommendation 32: That regulations, and thereby applications, for the higher doctorates should be suspended until the revised regulations, University guidance, and local guidance are in place.

Recommendation 33: That a working group should be established with appropriate representation from the divisions, Examinations and Assessments, and Education Policy Support to take forward the recommendations of the review.

List of recommendations

Recommendation 1: That the term ‘higher degrees’ should be replaced by the term ‘higher doctorates’ in University usage.

Recommendation 2: That the DM should no longer be defined as a higher doctorate, and that the implications of this for University ceremonial and any other functions should be referred for consideration by the appropriate bodies.

Recommendation 3: That the DSc should be retained as the sole title for higher doctorate awards within the fields of study covered by the Medical Sciences Division.

Recommendation 4: That standard questions regarding age, ethnicity, and disability should be added to the application form to enable monitoring of key protected characteristics.

Recommendation 5: That the higher doctorates should be retained as earned awards of the University whose fundamental purpose is to recognise excellence in academic scholarship.

Recommendation 6: There should be a single and unified set of regulations for all the higher doctorates with the exception that the Doctor of Music would retain its own award criteria.

Recommendation 7: That all current members of Congregation and graduates of the University should be eligible to apply for a higher doctorate.

Recommendation 8: The award criteria for the higher doctorates (excluding the DMus) should be revised as follows:

‘Whether the evidence submitted demonstrates excellence in academic scholarship and is:

- of the absolute highest quality
- substantial in scale and in the contribution it has made to knowledge
- sustained over time and showing current and continued contribution to scholarship
- authoritative, being able to demonstrate impact on the work of others
- of global reach and international importance within the field
- of such breadth or covering such branches of knowledge appropriate to the field and in line with disciplinary norms and expectations.’

Recommendation 9: That the Faculty of Music should be invited to propose a revised form of the award criteria for the DMus, to be consistent in style with that recommended for the other higher doctorates, in order to incorporate them in the proposed single entry in the Examination Regulations, whilst retaining the necessary distinction required by the particular character of the award.

Recommendation 10: The divisions, working with their departments and faculties, should decide where overall responsibility for managing the process of higher doctorates within the division should rest, that is whether the division or the departments and faculties should be the 'responsible body'.

Recommendation 11: Local guidance should be produced by responsible bodies and approved and monitored on behalf of Education Committee.

Recommendation 12: University guidance should be produced to complement the regulations.

Recommendation 13: That a new set of webpages should be established to inform potential applicants as to the nature and requirements of the higher doctorates and to host key documents such as the local and University guidance and application materials.

Recommendation 14: That a new application pack should be developed for all higher doctorates, drawing on that currently used by MPLS for the DSc.

Recommendation 15: That applications should continue to be invited on an open basis, but that departments and faculties and colleges might wish to invite an application from a specific candidate.

Recommendation 16: That applications should be submitted during a specified period, operated on a cyclical basis, with applications across a single division to be considered in one academic year, and rotating through the divisions on a four-yearly basis.

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- **An application form**
- **A document of no more than 10 pages of A4 (minimum 11pt, single spaced) to include a statement as to how they meet the criteria for the award, a CV, and a list of key/representative publications**
- **Any individuals they would like to see excluded from the pool of judges on grounds of conflict of interest, with grounds to be explained.**

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Recommendation 21: That the University guidance to responsible bodies should include guidance on managing conflicts of interest in the appointment of judges.

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- monitor the demographic characteristics of candidates; and to
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List of appendices

Appendix 1	Terms of reference of the review
Appendix 2	Review panel membership

Appendix 1: Terms of reference of the review

- (1) To consider whether the University should continue to offer higher degrees, having regard to:
 - a. Purpose: whether the offering of these awards is important for the University's academic strategy, or uniquely meets any other need;
 - b. Practice across the sector: whether universities continue to provide higher degrees solely to recognise the achievement of their own alumni, or whether the practice has been largely abandoned;
 - c. Value for the individual: whether the value of the award to the individual has changed over time, given the universality of the doctorate as a qualification for academia, and the widespread award of professorial titles.
- (2) To consider on what terms the University should continue to offer higher degrees, in particular:
 - a. The qualifications of a person eligible to be considered;
 - b. The criteria for their award;
 - c. The relationship between higher degrees and research degrees;
 - d. Whether all or only some subject areas might offer higher degrees;
 - e. The role and duties of judges, the process for their appointment, and the responsibility for final decisions.
 - f. The best management of the awards, given their infrequency but highly individual requirements;
 - g. Communication with candidates;
 - h. Regulations for the degrees especially to clarify: ownership and oversight; the role of the Proctors; provision for an appeals process.
- (3) To make recommendations to Education Committee, in the light of (1) and (2), as to whether the University should continue to offer higher degrees and the terms and scope of any continuation of provision, or the timing of any discontinuation of provision, having regard to the implications for both the wider University and individual candidates (including any possible implications for the award and standing of honorary doctorates should the substantive degrees be abolished).

Appendix 2: Review panel membership

Professor Henry Woudhuysen	Chair
Professor Anne Davis	External member (Cambridge)
Professor Martin Williams	Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences Divisional Board nominee
Professor David Paterson	Medical Sciences Divisional Board nominee
Dr Steven Gunn	Humanities Divisional Board nominee
Professor Roger Goodman	Social Sciences Divisional Board nominee
Professor Angus Hawkins	Continuing Education Board nominee
Professor Michael Keith	Research Committee nominee
Dr Kate Blackmon	Proctor or former Proctor

The review was supported by:

Mrs Philippa O'Connor	Education Policy Support
Mrs Rachel Dearlove	Education Policy Support (Secretary)