Programme Specification for MPhil

This document applies to Academic Year 2025/26 onwards

1.	**Awarding institution/body**	University of Worcester
2.	**Teaching institution**	University of Worcester
3.	**Programme accredited by**	n/a
4.	**Final award or awards**	MPhil
5.	**Programme title**	Master of Philosophy
6.	**Pathways available**	n/a
7.	**Mode and/or site of delivery**	Supervision, face-to-face and virtual, with taught elements (delivered through blended learning) for the embedded PG Cert and the wider Researcher Development Programme
8.	**Mode of attendance and duration**	Full time and Part time
9.	**UCAS Code**	n/a
10.	**Subject Benchmark statement and/or professional body statement**	The programme is mapped on to Vitae's Researcher Development Framework and on to the QAA's Chapter B11 of the Quality Code
11.	**Date of Programme Specification preparation/ revision**	August 2016, August 2017 - AQU amendments, August 2018 – AQU amendments, February 2019 – AQU amendments, January 2021 – Research School amendments June 2022- Research School amendments June 2023 – Research School amendments June 2024 – Doctoral School amendments June 2025 – Doctoral School amendments

12. Educational aims of the programme

The programme aims to equip students with the skills to design, research and write a research–based project to the standard expected at MPhil by the University of Worcester.

The MPhil thesis is either a record of original work or of an ordered and critical exposition of existing knowledge and shall provide evidence that the field has been thoroughly surveyed.

13. Intended learning outcomes and learning, teaching and assessment methods

Students completing the programme will have acquired a range of analytical and presentational skills appropriate to a wide range of professional activities and will be able to:

1. frame questions about complex problems and conduct research at a high level to answer those questions.

2. Offer critical appraisal of other research in the field.
3. Gather evidence of different kinds from different sources.
4. Demonstrate understanding and utilise a range of research methods together with their implementation in analysis.
5. Present arguments consistent with such evidence and analysis present their research findings effectively in both oral and written form reflecting technical proficiency in the English language.

Learning, teaching and assessment

All students must engage in and pass a PG Certificate in Research Methods during the early stages of the MPhil (by the end of Year 1 for full time students and the end of Year 2 for part time students) in order to develop the skills, knowledge and understanding to plan, design and implement a programme of research. They are also expected to engage in a wider Research Student Development Programme across their MPhil in order to continue to develop their research skills but also to develop skills to enable the successful dissemination of their research and to prepare them for employment beyond the end of their MPhil.

The main mode of "teaching" is supervision from a team of experts who provide guidance and support and feedback on the student's programme of research at all stages from its inception to its implementation to the delivery of the thesis.

The student's progress is assessed by the supervisory team on an ongoing basis but more formally through an Annual Progress Review (APR).

The student is subject to summative assessment through the modules in the PG Cert and ultimately through the thesis and associated oral examination (*viva voce*) at the end of their programme.

Teaching

For the PG Cert and the wider Research Student Development programme, students are taught through a combination of interactive workshops, lectures, online courses, practical sessions (including lab sessions), and fieldwork as appropriate to the student's field of study:

- Interactive workshops take a variety of formats and are intended to enable the application of learning through discussion and small group activities.
- Lectures are focused on imparting high-level general information.
- Online courses are focused on developing general research skills.
- Practical sessions and fieldwork are focused on developing subject specific research skills and are mainly delivered by the supervisory team.

Supervision is undertaken by a team of 2-3 supervisors one of whom is designated as the Director of Studies who will normally be the primary supervisor, responsible for overseeing student progress, managing supervisory relations and ensuring the student complies with regulatory requirements and relevant processes. Supervision will be undertaken through meetings, face-to-face and virtual, and through detailed comment and feedback on written work.

Contact time

Full time students can expect 30 hours of supervision/year from the team which will include supervisory meetings and other contact but also time spent on providing feedback on written work.

Part time students can expect 20 hours of supervision/ year from the team which will include supervisory meetings and other contact but also time spent on providing feedback on written work.

Independent self-study

A MPhil student is expected to engage extensively in independent self-study. A full time student should expect to work up to 37 hours per week on their programme of research and a part time student up to 18.5 hours per week; some of this time will involve engagement with the PG Cert, the Research Student Development Programme and with supervision but this will vary week to week and year to year.

Teaching staff

The PG Cert, and associated Research Student Development Programme, is delivered by a teaching team whose expertise and knowledge are closely matched to the content of the modules on the course.

They will be supported by professors and other senior researchers across the University, particularly in the delivery of subject specific research skills, approaches and methods.

Supervisory teams are required collectively to bring the expertise and experience to guide and support the student through their programme of research.

14. Assessment strategy

Students are assessed in 4 ways during the programme:

a) Their skills development is assessed through the embedded PG Cert in Research Methods which they must complete and pass to progress with their MPhil programme.
b) Their progress against the programme of research which they develop with the guidance and support of their supervisory team and through the PG Cert is assessed through Annual Progress Review.
c) Their progress is also kept under constant review by their supervisory team.
d) Finally, all students must submit a thesis and defend this thesis at an oral examination (*viva voce*) which determines if they have met the Learning Outcomes and if they should be awarded a MPhil.

PG Cert

In line with the University of Worcester's Assessment Policy, the assessment strategy on the PG Cert has been designed to help ensure that students meet the learning outcomes for the course. Assessments have been linked towards facilitating the development of the skills this programme is designed to foster, whether the academic skills of knowledge and methodological application, the intellectual cognitive skills required for the successful completion of their MPhil, practice skills or transferrable skills applicable both to their ongoing study but also their future career (e.g. developing digital literacy, techniques of data collection, or skills in project design, management and execution). While our assessment strategy does seek to offer students a variety of challenges appropriate to the level of study, each preparing

them in a different way for their MPhil programme of research, that variety is also aimed towards fostering broader skills that will benefit them beyond their research degree programme. This is built on through the wider Research Student Development Programme.

Annual Progress Review

All students will be subject to an Annual Progress Review, the first of which will take place no later than 12 months after initial registration then every 12 months thereafter until the submission of the thesis.

The Annual Progress Review (APR) is designed to complement the ongoing monitoring of research student progress by the supervisory team. It sets out to provide an independent assessment of a student's progress against the requirements of the degree and the student's own programme of research as agreed with the supervisory team. The review is designed: to allow student and supervisors to reflect on progress; to provide assurance to the University that the student's progress is as expected and the programme of research is fit for purpose; to identify any problems or issues that have emerged over the previous 12 months; and to establish an action plan to address any problems or issues thus enabling the student to get back on track.

Supervisory Review

it is the role of the supervisory team, in particular the Director of Studies, to keep the student's progress under regular review throughout the programme of research and to raise any concerns as soon as these arise.

Examination

The assessment of the programme as a whole is based on a two-stage process:

- an assessment of a written thesis (and where appropriate other documentation or artefacts such a performance, exhibition or artwork) by an examination panel of 2-3 examiners, who are experts in the field of study.
- an oral examination at which the student is asked to "defend" their thesis in front of the same examination panel, demonstrating that the written thesis is their work, that they are aware of its strengths and weaknesses and that they are able to explain and justify any issues or problems in the written thesis.

15. Programme structures and requirements

PG Cert

Please see the Programme Specification for the PG Cert in Research Methods.

Annual Progress Review

The review will be undertaken initially by the Programme Leader or nominee whose role is to assess the student's progress against the programme of research and to make recommendations to University's Research Degrees Board (responsible for oversight of the PhD programme from registration to examination).

The Programme Leader's assessment will be based on consideration of written documentation submitted by the student, the Director of Studies and Doctoral School (DS). The written documentation required for review will be determined by the stage the student has reached in their programme and will be set out in the relevant Course Handbook.

The Programme Leader or nominee will make one of the following recommendations to Research Degrees Board (RDB) for each student reviewed. If the Programme Leader has concerns about both the standard of work and progress, then they will select option 3 but make a note of this in their recommendation:

i. The student's progress and standard of work, including their technical proficiency in the English language, is at or above expectations; the student may progress, and no further action is required.
ii. The student's progress and standard of work, including their technical proficiency in the English language, is at or above expectations but there are some outstanding issues identified by the Programme Leader (usually certain deadlines that have not been met, for example, completion of the PG cert or ethical approval); the student may progress subject to providing a satisfactory response to the issues outlined by the Programme Leader by an agreed deadline.
iii. The student's standard of work, including their technical proficiency in the English language, is below expectations. The student should be referred to an APR panel to include feedback from an expert reviewer selected by the supervisory team.
iv. Although the standard of work meets expectations, including their technical proficiency in the English language, the rate of progress for the student is below expectations. The student should be referred to an APR panel. No expert reviewer is required for this panel.
v. There is insufficient evidence in the student's folder to demonstrate that the student's progress and /or standard of work is at or above expectations. The student should be referred to an APR Panel. No expert reviewer is required for this panel.

Programme Leaders can call a Panel where they have concerns about both standard of work and progress (recommendation 3 and 4). Where a Programme Leader has concerns about the standard of the student's work (Recommendation iii above), they should work with the supervisory team to identify an expert to provide written feedback on the significant piece of written work to the APR panel. The expert must not be on the supervisory team and will normally be a member of academic staff on the register of approved supervisors but can also be, if appropriate, an Honorary Visiting or Emeritus colleague The expert should have relevant disciplinary and/or methodological expertise. It will be for the Programme Leader and supervisory team to decide if, for example, methodological expertise is particularly needed, more so than disciplinary expertise, such that they can review and provide comment on the student's significant piece of written work. The expert should also normally have experience of doctoral supervision and/or examination as they will be asked to give their perspective on the "level" of the student's work, i.e. is the work at doctoral standard or is it on course to meet doctoral standards?

We will ask the expert to provide a written commentary on the written work before the panel meeting. The expert will not normally attend the Panel meeting.

If the Programme Leader is of the view that the student's progress is being limited by their supervisory team, for example, supervisors are not engaging with supervision, available for supervisory meetings, responding to drafts of work in a timely manner etc, this will always be referred to an APR Panel.

Where a student's response to the Programme Leader (ii above) is not satisfactory, the Programme Leader may:

i. Refer the student to an APR panel.
ii. Request further information by a specified deadline. If the Programme Leader is still not satisfied with the response, they should then refer the student to an APR panel.

Where a student does not provide documentation or a response by the deadline then the Programme Leader will normally refer the student to an APR panel. A student will not be referred to an APR panel when a delay is caused by information not being provided by the DS or Supervisory Team.

The APR panel will normally include:

- Chair: College Director RKE or Chair of RDB
- Programme Leader or nominee
- RDPO or Head of Doctoral Services as note taker (standard of work panels only).

The Panel will be attended by the student and normally, their whole supervisory team but can go ahead with just one supervisor. Panel meetings can take place in person or on Microsoft Teams, however, all Panels that are called due to concerns around standard of work will be organised in person, if possible. If the Panel meeting takes place on Microsoft Teams, the Panel meeting will not be recorded in any form. Notes of the actions agreed will be attached to the Chair's report, sent to the student after the meeting.

Where an expert reviewer has been invited to provide a written report to the panel regarding the academic standard of a piece of submitted work, this will have been submitted and shared with the Panel in advance. The written report will include the opportunity for an expert reviewer to provide a recommendation regarding proposed next steps for the student. The Panel will consider the expert recommendation in relation to their overall Panel recommendation. The student will see but will not be expected to respond to this report until after the Panel meeting. The report will be placed in their SharePoint file to help them prepare for the panel meeting. The Panel report will be sent to the student after the Panel meeting. A suitable response to this expert report will be part of the overall Panel's recommendation.

The Panel will comprise of 4 stages. **Stage 1** will be a Pre-Meet, attended by the Chair and Programme Leader to set the agenda. **Stage 2** will be a meeting of the student with the Panel but without the Supervisory Team present. **Stage 3** will form the substantive panel meeting, attended by the student, Supervisory Team, Chair, Programme Leader and RDPO. **Stage 4** will be a post-meeting involving the Chair, Programme Leader and supervisory team.

Outcome of the APR Meeting

The Chair, with the support of the Head of DS (if in attendance) is responsible for producing a brief report on the appropriate template, post Panel meeting and will make one of the following recommendations to RDB (sent to the student and DoS by email within 5 working days of the Panel meeting- see below). The report will outline actions for the student to complete, timeframe for completion and who will approve these changes. The report will be accompanied by the expert reviewer's report, if used

Outcome of Panel Meeting	Recommendation	Further action
1. The student's progress and standard of work is at or above expectations.	The student may progress and no further action is required.	
2. The student's standard of work is below expectations.	The student must complete work and/or respond to feedback outlined by the Panel by an agreed deadline.	In this case, the student's response will be sent back to and considered by the Panel and expert reviewer who may recommend the following to RDB: a. The student has responded satisfactorily to the actions specified and no further action is required. b. The student has not responded satisfactorily to the actions specified. A second Panel will be convened and at this meeting, the student should be given a specified timeframe to provide a further response.
3. The rate of progress for the student is below expectations.	The student must respond to a set of actions determined by the Panel by a specified deadline	In this case, the student's response will be sent to and considered by the Panel who may recommend the following to RDB: a. The student has responded satisfactorily to the actions specified and no further action is required. The student may progress. b. The student has responded satisfactorily to the actions specified but the Programme Leader will also arrange to meet the student and DoS within an agreed timeframe (normally within 6 months of the APR Panel meeting) to check on progress. c. The student has not responded satisfactorily to the actions specified. A second Panel will be convened and at this meeting, the student should be given a specified timeframe to provide a further response. As in (b) above, the Programme Leader may also ask to the student and DoS within an agreed timeframe (normally within 6 months of the APR Panel meeting) to check on progress.

The student's response to a Panel's recommendation must be signed off by the supervisory team and sent back to the RDPO. The RDPO will pass this to the Panel and expert reviewer (if used) by the deadlines given. The Panel (to include the expert reviewer if used) should briefly meet to discuss this response (it may sometimes be appropriate to do this by correspondence). If all parties are satisfied that the student has responded satisfactorily, the Chair will inform the Doctoral School in writing that they approve progression and the RDPO will write to the student and supervisory team.

If the Panel deems that the student's response to the Panel's feedback and recommendations is not satisfactory, then a second Panel meeting will need to take place with the student and supervisory team present. If an expert reviewer was used, they will be asked to join the second panel meeting as a Panel member to allow a full and open discussion about their concerns. At this second Panel meeting, the Panel will explain why they are not satisfied with the student's response, the student will be able to defend their response and the student should then be given one more chance to provide a response to the Panel's recommendations.

As at Panel 1, drawing on the notes of the RDPO, the Chair is responsible for producing a brief report on the appropriate template, post Panel. The report will outline actions for the student to complete, timeframe for completion and who will approve these changes.

The student's response to a second Panel's recommendations (signed off by the Supervisory Team) will be sent back to the Panel and expert (if used) by the deadline given.

If the second Panel (to include the expert reviewer, if used), deems that this further response is not satisfactory, the Panel may recommend that RDB withdraw the student from the programme.

Where a student does not respond by any deadline without explanation, RDB may withdraw the student from the programme.

Where a student's progress is deemed below expectations in two consecutive Annual Progress Reviews, RDB may withdraw the student from the programme without need for further action.

Examination

The requirements for the thesis are as follows:

- Maximum 40,000 words including footnotes, but excluding the table of contents, abstract, tabulated data, diagrams, any appendices and the bibliography:

There will be a +10% margin for the maximum word count. There is no fixed penalty for exceeding this word count but, in line with the University's 'Policy on Word Count' the examiner will not normally consider any work after the +10% margin has been reached.

The length of a thesis for an MPhil that includes material other than in written form must be discussed between the student and supervisor at the beginning of the programme.

Where a programme of research involves the student's own creative work and this forms, as a point of origin or reference, a significant part of the intellectual enquiry, then the 'thesis' is understood to mean the totality of the work submitted for the degree. For this reason, the 'practice' element must be accessible to the Examiners prior to the *viva voce* examination. Where it is not practical to replicate creative work, it must be displayed appropriately, catalogued and labelled for the examiners to view.

The oral examination (viva voce) will normally take the form of a meeting of 1-3 hours to discuss the content of the thesis, although the timeframe may on occasion extend beyond this.

16. QAA and professional academic standards and quality

The programme is designed to meet with the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education - Chapter B11: Research degrees.

It also meets with the FHEQ qualification descriptors at level 7.

It has also been designed in accordance with Vitae's Researcher Development Framework.

17. Support for students

Students are provided with:

- direct support from their supervisory team
- support from the Programme Leader for their College
- access to a wider programme of Research Student Development that builds on and scaffolds the PG Cert
- day to day support through the Doctoral School
- access to a variety of resources through our VLE focused on research students
- training opportunities for career planning through the Doctoral School and the Careers Service
- support through the International office for overseas students
- support through the Language Unit for International Students
- access to the Disability and Dyslexia Service
- access to wider Student Support services

18. Admissions

Admission requirements

For MPhil:

- First or Upper Second Class Honours Degree or equivalent award in an appropriate discipline; or
- The applicant has appropriate research or professional experience at postgraduate level which has resulted in published work, written reports or other appropriate evidence of achievement.

Recognition of Prior Learning
Students with relevant previous study at postgraduate level or with extensive experience may be considered eligible for recognition of prior learning for elements of the embedded PG Cert (see relevant programme specification).

Admissions policy

All applicants are directed to webpages outlining a step by step application process.

Applicants are first advised to visit the 'Research Areas' section of the relevant MPhil/PhD course webpages (where lists of current supervisors and areas of supervisory expertise are provided) to find one or more potential supervisors.

Applicants are then asked to complete a Research Overview which briefly outlines the project and how they will go about doing it. Applicants will share this Research Overview with one or more potential supervisors. If supported to do so, applicants can then go on to submit a full application, to include a Research Proposal, through the online application portal.

~~Students will in some cases discuss their research interests and potential research project informally with potential supervisors prior to submitting an application. This will help establish, for both parties, that staff have the necessary expertise to supervise the proposal and to identify whether the intended research project would require additional, available resources.~~

All applications are submitted to the Doctoral School and passed to the relevant Doctoral Programme leader for initial consideration. Applications are assessed both on the selection criteria below and in terms of: the correlation between the proposed project; the students' prior experience and achievement; and the availability of necessary supervisory expertise. Additional selection criteria will be made clear prior to an interview. Where the application has potential, an interview will be scheduled with a panel comprising two members of academic staff (as specified as an indicator of academic quality in Chapter B11: 'Research Degrees' of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education) one of whom should be the potential supervisor. Completion of an interview checklist will allow for a rigorous and measurable evaluation of the candidate's strengths and their suitability for the programme.

International applications will, initially, be checked by Ecctis. Copies of all certificates will be required before an unconditional offer can be made to the student. If the application has potential, the interview procedure detailed above will be followed, with the interview conducted (e.g. via Skype or Microsoft Teams if necessary).

Admissions/selection criteria

The admission of any individual applicant to the MPhil programme is judged by the proposed supervisor in conjunction with the relevant Programme Leader who acts as admissions tutor. Those judgements may be supported, as appropriate, by other members of academic staff, the Doctoral School, and the International Office.

Where an offer is made, details of the offer and conditions are passed back to the Doctoral School where a comprehensive offer letter are produced. For international students, the information and offer conditions are passed to the relevant personnel in Student Services who can also provide the student with additional support and guidance (for example, to obtain a visa, accommodation).

International students will also be required to demonstrate that they have the appropriate level of written and spoken English (normally IELTS score of 6.5 with no less than 6 in any component). Entry qualifications for international students are guided by Ecctis.

An offer of a place on the MPhil will be made when the following conditions are satisfied:

- The applicant meets the specified entry requirements.
- The School has the supervisory capacity and expertise to support the research project outlined in the application form.
- The proposal outlined has the potential to become a viable research project both at doctoral level (i.e. in accordance with QAA descriptors) and with regard to the context of the subject area and the School's existing research expertise and strategic priorities.

19. Regulation of assessment

The embedded PG Cert operates under the University's Taught Courses Regulatory Framework (TCRF) (see separate programme specification).

The MPhil programme operates under the Research Degree Regulatory Framework (RDRF).

Examination Arrangements

The Director of Studies must identify examiners for the MPhil who must then be approved by Research Degrees Board. There should at least 2 but no more than 3 independent examiners. At least one examiner must be external to the University in all cases but where the regulations require it the whole panel must be external. The panel must also have the expertise and experience as set out in the regulations.

Examination arrangements must be submitted a minimum of three months in advance of the proposed date of the viva voce and considerably earlier for a MPhil involving practice.

Examination

Each examiner is required to read and assess the thesis and to submit an independent preliminary report to the University before any viva voce is held. As part of that assessment, each examiner must consider whether the thesis provisionally satisfies the University's requirements for the degree concerned and, where possible, make an appropriate provisional decision, subject to the outcome of the viva voce examination.

The panel for the viva voce will consist of the same examiners and an independent chair who oversees the conduct of the viva. The Director of Studies or other supervisor may attend the viva voce, subject to the consent of the student, as an observer. Participation in the discussion however is not permitted

Examination Outcomes

These, along with reassessment outcomes, are detailed in the Research Degree Regulatory Framework.

Where amendments are required, these will be provided in detail by the examiners.

Where the outcome is the degree not be awarded, the examiners are required to prepare an agreed statement of the deficiencies of the thesis or portfolio and critical overview and give the reasons for their decision, to be forwarded to the student by the University.

Where the examiners cannot reach an agreement on the outcome, they must submit separate reports based on which the University will reach a decision.

Reassessment

The examiners will make the decision that the student be permitted to resubmit for the degree concerned and to be reassessed when the work submitted does not meet the required level of the award.

Only one opportunity for reassessment of the thesis shall be allowed. All reassessment vivas will normally take place in person.

20. Graduate destinations, employability and links with employers

The programme is designed to develop core research and transferable skills and to enhance the employability of the student within an academic and research context but also outside of this context.

Please note: This specification provides a concise summary of the main features of the programme and the learning outcomes that a typical student might reasonably be expected to achieve and demonstrate if s/he takes full advantage of the learning opportunities that are provided. More detailed information on the learning outcomes, content and teaching, learning

and assessment methods can be found in associated course documentation e.g. course handbooks, module outlines and module specifications.