

6. Progress towards Graduation

6.1 Graduation requirements

All RPg students are required to fulfil a set of graduation requirements as prescribed by the Programme in order to graduate. Some of the requirements are compulsory for all while some are specific to individual programmes or individual students. Different types of graduation requirements will be introduced briefly in the following sections. Students should refer to the Course List, Course Descriptions and Study Scheme of their own programmes in the *Postgraduate Student Handbook* for details. Besides, RPg students should report and record the fulfilment of candidacy and graduation requirements in the Study Plan and Progress Report for RPg studies in consultation with the Supervisor.

6.2 Course requirements

The course requirements set out the required courses and elective courses, if applicable, of the Programme. Taught courses (excluding courses with research elements, such as “Research”, “Thesis Research”, “Thesis Preparation”, etc.) aim to enhance the knowledge in research. In general, the requirement for different RPg programmes is as follows:

- (a) Not less than 12 units for research master’s;
- (b) Not less than 12 units for research doctoral students in the pre-candidacy stage, completion of which will be part of the candidacy requirements.

The two requirements can be identical, but a higher requirement can be set for Ph.D. candidacy if the Graduate Division so desires. Doctoral students without a research master’s degree may be required to take additional courses. The Graduate Division may specify the minimum grade at which these courses must be passed.

Students should take at least one course in each term, unless otherwise stated in the Study Scheme or approved by the Head of the Graduate Division. In addition, students’ research progress is monitored through taking “Thesis Research” courses. The minimum number of units to be taken by RPg students in each Term is given below. Each unit is regarded as equivalent to approximately three hours of study/research per week by the student.

Status	Full-time (no. of units)	Part-time (no. of units)
M.Phil.	6	3
Ph.D. (pre-candidacy)	6	3
Ph.D. (post-candidacy)	12	6
Continuing Students	3	3

6.3 Postgraduate students taking undergraduate courses

Postgraduate students are allowed to enrol in undergraduate courses (4000 level or below) in the following situations:

- (a) Taking undergraduate courses as make-up requirements.
A RPg student with a first degree of a different subject than the postgraduate programme may have to make up for some undergraduate courses as assigned by the Supervisor.
- (b) RPg students may take other undergraduate courses, typically in a different subject, purely out of interest (e.g., calligraphy or music), or to develop other skills (e.g., language, including a third language).

RPg students who wish to take undergraduate courses should first consult their Supervisors.

Programmes can include up to 15% of undergraduate courses in the programme requirements. GCEXCo's approval is required if Graduate Divisions request to include more than 15% undergraduate courses in the programme requirements.

6.4 Research thesis and oral examination

All RPg students are required to submit a research thesis and pass an oral examination. The schedule, procedures, and assessment of the research thesis and oral examination will be described in detail in Section 8 below.

6.5 Candidature for doctoral degree

There are two stages of Ph.D. studies: the pre-candidacy stage and the post-candidacy stage. No student will be admitted directly as a Ph.D. student (post-candidacy); such a status can only be gained by a Ph.D. student (pre-candidacy) upon satisfying all candidacy requirements. Only a Ph.D. (post-candidacy) candidate can submit a thesis and be examined.

The candidacy requirements are set by the Graduate Division, with administration taken care of by the Graduate School. The candidacy requirements include at least the following components:

- (a) Course requirements;
- (b) Candidacy Examination/Qualifying Examination; and
- (c) Thesis proposal and defence of the proposal for Articulated M.Phil.-Ph.D. Programmes only.

The Candidacy Examination or Qualifying Examination contains a written component of one or more papers, which cover the basic disciplinary knowledge expected of a Ph.D. student. The subject coverage is not specific to each student, but is the same for a broad subject category within each Graduate Division. The Graduate Division may specify that certain papers can be replaced by passing relevant courses at specified grades. There may be an additional oral component.

Advancement to research doctoral candidature (or Ph.D. (post-candidacy) stage for students admitted under the "M.Phil.-Ph.D. programmes") is conditional upon fulfilment of the candidacy requirements. The prevailing procedure takes the Supervisor and the Head of Graduate Division to sign off on a

document “Notification of Fulfilment of Candidacy Requirements” to confirm the completion of candidacy requirements of individual students.

6.6 Candidacy Examination and Qualifying Examination

Candidacy Examination and Qualifying Examination are two different terms used in the assessment of Ph.D. students who are admitted under the “articulated” and “non-articulated” programmes, respectively.

Students (pre-candidacy) should refer to the study schemes of their own programmes in the *Postgraduate Student Handbook* for the detailed requirements.

For “articulated” programmes, the maximum period to pass the Candidacy Examinations, counted from first entry to the programme, is tabulated below, failing which the student concerned will be discontinued from studies at the University:

Degree	Full-time	Part-time
Ph.D. (entering with a research master’s degree)	24 months	32 months
Ph.D. (entering without a research master’s degree)	36 months	48 months

However, for “non-articulated” programmes, the maximum period to pass the Qualifying Examination is defined by individual Graduate Divisions. Students should consult the programmes of studies of each Graduate Division in the *Postgraduate Student Handbook* for details.

6.7 Improving Postgraduate Learning

While there is no universally accepted approach for teaching students to be more creative in research, there are some basic principles, methodologies, and skills with which students can equip themselves in the arduous task of doing research. Most knowledge and skills are imparted by the students’ Supervisors as they work together. However, some skills are cross-disciplinary in nature and can be taught in a more formal or systematic manner, e.g., laboratory safety, searching for and analysis of information, principles and ethics in documentation, and presentation skills.

For over the past two decades, the Graduate School has organised related short courses to help postgraduate students do their research. These modules are collectively referred to as the Improving Postgraduate Learning (IPL) programme and are coordinated by CLEAR.

Most IPL short courses are optional for postgraduate students. However, all research postgraduate students should consider seriously taking every module that has potential relevance to their research endeavours. Supervisors and Graduate Division Heads should also promote these modules to their students.

All research postgraduate students are required to complete the following IPL modules in their first year of studies as part of the candidacy and graduation requirements with effect from the 2022-23 intake. For clarity, note that M.Phil. and Doctor of Nursing students are also expected to fulfill the stipulated IPL requirements within their first year.

1) Research Data Management (RDM) is of increasing interest and importance to the academia. More and more research funders require researchers to submit data management plans as part of grant applications and share their research data to the scholarly community. In light of these policies and requirements, the Research Data Management (RDM) Training is incorporated into an appropriate IPL module offered by the Library. Students are required to complete the online course *Basics of Research Data Management* in the first year of study. Information is available at <https://clear.cuhk.edu.hk/web/professional-development-pd/improving-postgraduate-learning>.

2) The University Safety Office (USO) has stipulated in its notes to students, available at <https://clear.cuhk.edu.hk/IPL/IPL-LaboratorySafety.pdf>, that students as advised by their supervisors or Graduate Divisions to take safety courses (excluding the Animal Experimentation at CUHK) are required to attend the course(s) and pass the corresponding examination(s) in their first year of study, effective from the 2022-23 intake. The information is also available from the study scheme in the Postgraduate Student Handbook.

6.8 Observing Intellectual Property and Copyright Law during Research and Research Ethics Training Module on Publication Ethics

In addition to completing the IPL modules stipulated for partial fulfilment of candidacy requirements, students are also required to complete the following IPL modules for graduation.

The online module *Observing Intellectual Property and Copyright Law during Research* is compulsory for all RPg students. Relevant information is available on the CLEAR website at <https://clear.cuhk.edu.hk/web/professional-development-pd/improving-postgraduate-learning/>.

To strengthen researchers' awareness of ethical concepts, the Research Office offers Research Ethics Training (RET) which contains four online modules in the following domains: (a) *Human Subject Ethics*; (b) *Laboratory Animals Ethics*; (c) *Survey and Behavioural Ethics*; and (d) *Publication Ethics*. All RPg students admitted in 2017-18 and thereafter are required to complete the online RET module on *Publication Ethics* and obtain a valid Publication Ethics Certificate for graduation. More information on RET is available at www.research-ethics.cuhk.edu.hk/web/.

6.9 Other requirements

Graduate School and Graduate Divisions may prescribe additional term-end assessment and graduation requirements for students. Examples include:

- Language requirement, e.g., knowledge of spoken Cantonese and written Chinese may be required for some courses taught in Cantonese and English.
- A higher minimum cumulative GPA (e.g., 2.5) for graduation.
- Additional requirements for individual students may be set by the Graduate Division or Supervisor, depending on the academic progress of the students.

All research postgraduate students and taught doctoral students admitted in 2025/26 or thereafter are required to submit a Data Management Plan (DMP). Relevant information is available at: <https://libguides.lib.cuhk.edu.hk/rdm/mandate-support>.

- PhD and taught doctoral students (excluding Doctor of Nursing students) must submit a DMP prior to completing the candidacy fulfilment process. The Thesis Supervisor and the Head of Graduate Division will confirm the DMP completion when signing the document “Notification of Fulfilment of Candidacy Requirements” for each student.
- M.Phil. and Doctor of Nursing students are expected to complete their DMP submission within the first year of study. Compliance will be checked during graduation assessment.
- The final DMP should have been shared to the CUHK community on DMPTool or the relevant platform that CUHK provides when submitting the final version of the thesis/portfolio to the Graduate School.

All RPgs and taught doctoral students admitted in 2025/26 or thereafter are strongly encouraged to preserve their research data. Where data sharing is intended, supervisors and students should work together to develop appropriate implementation plans. Relevant information is available at: <https://libguides.lib.cuhk.edu.hk/rdm/mandate-support>.

6.10 Course and unit exemptions

Students who have already completed equivalent courses may apply for exemption from taking some courses and/or units by taking the following actions:

- (a) Check their eligibility by reading the *Policy on Course and Unit Exemptions for Postgraduate Students* (available in the *Postgraduate Student Handbook*);
- (b) Consult the Graduate Division on the possibility of granting course and unit exemptions;
- (c) Complete the prescribed online application form and attach any required supporting documents for submission to the Graduate Division via CUSIS; and
- (d) Pay the required fee.

Applications will be considered on a case-by-case basis. The decision rests with the Head of the Graduate Division and is subject to approval by the Dean of the Graduate School.

6.11 Study Plan and Progress Report for RPg Studies

In order to improve supervision, ensure timely progress, and encourage broader training, the Graduate School requires each RPg student, together with his/her Supervisor or, if no Supervisor has been assigned yet, a divisional adviser, to complete an online Study Plan and Progress Report for RPg Studies on an annual basis.

The report is divided into two parts. The 1st part deals with the requirements of the whole programme. Students/Supervisors are required to complete this part. The 2nd part is an annual account on the courses/other requirements completed by the students in each study year.

At the end of each academic year, Supervisors will meet with their RPg students to record the progress of the students’ academic activities and fulfilment of the programme requirements against the study plan. Students also have the opportunity to read the comments given by their Supervisors. Supervisors should monitor students’ progress to ensure that the students fulfil the coursework

requirements, Candidacy Examination/Qualifying Examination, and any other graduation requirements within the study period.

6.12 Departmental duties and teaching assistance

As a condition of the PGS award, RPg students shall carry out assignments relating to teaching and research as part of their postgraduate studies, normally for not more than 12 hours per week on average, as prescribed by the respective Department Chairperson, School Director, or Faculty Dean. PGS holders are requested to observe at all times the *Code of Conduct for Postgraduate Studentship Holders* which is enclosed in the Admission Offer and Letter of Award at the time of admission.

RPg students who are Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme (HKPFS) awardees and RPg students who are not PGS holders (such as part-time RPg students or full-time RPg students who opt not to receive PGS) do as a matter of principle not have the obligation to carry out the assignments. However, Department Chairpersons, School Directors or Faculty Deans may assign teaching and research-related duties also to HKPFS awardees and RPg students who are not PGS holders for training purposes.

Undertaking undergraduate teaching in the capacity of a Teaching Assistant (TA) during the study period is one of the common departmental duties which is also regarded by both the RPg students and the Graduate Divisions as part of the students' education. PhD students may serve as teaching assistants of postgraduate courses, provided that they have completed the candidacy requirements, are qualified to take up the teaching duties, and are not enrolled in the courses themselves. Course instructors should provide appropriate supervision to the teaching assistants and handle conflicts of interest that may arise due to, e.g., relationships between the teaching assistants and students in their courses. In particular, a teaching assistant should not be involved in the assessment of a student with whom s/he has a conflict of interest.

The *Guidelines on the Allocation of Teaching Duties to RPg Students* should be observed in assigning duties to RPg students. RPg students who will take up TA duties are required to attend training courses offered by CLEAR. Students may refer to the CLEAR website (www.cuhk.edu.hk/clear) for more details.

6.13 Language policy

CUHK is a bilingual (Chinese and English) university. The University has three goals related to language proficiency at the postgraduate level:

- (a) At the time of admission, ensure a proper alignment of the language proficiency of students with the language of instruction adopted by the programme;
- (b) After admission, ensure that students have the opportunity to continue strengthening their language proficiency; and
- (c) Provide students with opportunities to be exposed to Chinese language and culture, particularly those without such exposure prior to admission.

The majority of postgraduate students at the University are proficient in Chinese and English, though there is a small number of overseas students who do not have prior exposure to the Chinese language and culture.

In addition, postgraduate students may wish to strengthen their proficiency in Chinese (Putonghua and/or Cantonese) and/or English for academic, professional, or other purposes, the programme in which they are enrolled may have specific language proficiency needs (such as proficiency in Japanese in the Japanese Studies programme), or the programme may for general educational purposes have a third language requirement. The University will continue to ensure that appropriate language courses are offered through the relevant units, including the Department of Chinese Language and Literature, Yale-China Chinese Language Academy, English Language Teaching Unit, Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages, and other relevant departments.