



UCL Academic Manual 2018-19

Chapter 5: Research Degrees Framework

Procedures for Viva Examination for Research Degrees

Guidance for Candidates at Points 1 – 4

Guidance for Examiners at Points 5 - 8

ADVICE TO CANDIDATES

1 Before the viva examination

1.1 You must send your completed examination entry form to Research Degrees, Assessment and Student Records in Student and Registry Services about three months before you are ready to submit.(see https://www.ucl.ac.uk/students/sites/students/files/res_deg_exam_entry_march_2018.doc for details). You may not submit your thesis until you have entered for the examination and your examination may be delayed if you have not done this.

1.2 Your supervisor is responsible for arranging the appointment of your examiners. This should be done at the same time as you complete your examination entry form, four months before you are due to submit your thesis. Examiners are appointed by UCL for their professional services as examiners with expert subject knowledge. A minimum of two examiners, one from outside UCL and (normally) one from UCL are appointed to co-examine all research degree candidates.

1.3 When your thesis is ready you must submit two soft-bound theses to the Student Centre (front of Chadwick Building), for dispatch to the examiners. Please refer to <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/srs/academic-manual/research-degrees/student-guidance/general> for full details of the process.

1.4 If you are contributing to a collaborative research project you must include this information in the introduction to the thesis. You must clearly identify the demarcation between the research you are submitting for examination as an original contribution to knowledge and the work of your collaborators.

1.5 Your supervisor (or nominee) will liaise with you and your examiners to arrange and confirm a mutually convenient time and place to hold the viva examination. It should take place at UCL and will usually be held in your supervisor's office. Your examiners should have your thesis at least six working weeks before the viva and this should not be arranged until you have submitted your thesis. Your viva should then take place within three months of the dispatch of the thesis to your examiners.

1.6 If you or one of your examiners have a disability which UCL cannot accommodate, other reasonable arrangements can be made for the viva. You must make a request in writing when you complete the examination entry form to allow time for arrangements to be made. Examination by video conference or by webcam are not normally permissible, but if there are extenuating circumstances, supervisors may apply for the suspension of regulations through Research Degrees in Student and Registry Services. All applications will be considered on a case-by-case basis. (researchdegrees@ucl.ac.uk).

2 Preparing for the viva examination ¹

2.1 The most obvious form of preparation is to re-read your thesis. Try to anticipate questions, comments and criticisms, and think how you would respond. Although you may not be able to anticipate actual questions to be asked by the examiners, this approach will encourage you to think actively about your work.

2.2 You should also refresh your memory of the relevant literature. Do not attempt to re-read every paper in the bibliography of your thesis; instead, re-read carefully some of the more recent key references. If you have left university after submitting your thesis you may be unaware of very recent work. Ask your supervisor a couple of weeks before the viva whether any work of direct relevance to your thesis has been published since you submitted your thesis.

2.3 A good way to prepare for your viva is to practise. Your supervisor should give you a mock viva, or arrange for this to be undertaken by a member of your upgrade panel.

3 During the viva examination

3.1 A viva is an academic interview at which your examiners will be looking for an understanding of the subject matter of your thesis, an appreciation of its significance to established knowledge in the field, and an awareness of the breadth of the subject area.

3.2 Your supervisor will be invited to attend your viva examination, unless you request otherwise; you must indicate this on your examination entry form. Your supervisor does not have the right to participate in the viva examination but may contribute if invited to do so by the examiners.

3.3 The examiners will expect you to:

- show a critical analysis of your own work and of that of others
- appreciate the limitations of the methods employed and the results obtained by yourself and others
- understand how the broad conclusions of your thesis support, add to or conflict with previous work
- know the major concepts and recent developments in your subject.

3.4 There is no formal procedure laid down for the conduct of the viva examination. Some examiners prefer to work through the thesis in the order in which it is written. Other examiners prefer to discuss topics. Very few examiners will perform a page by page criticism. You may be asked to prepare a presentation of your work in a suitable format.

3.5 You are not expected to know your thesis by heart, but to refer to the appropriate page when the examiners wish to discuss a specific point. **Please ensure that you bring to the viva examination a copy of your thesis paginated in the same way as the copies you have submitted to Student and Registry Services.**

3.6 Do not answer simply 'yes' or 'no' to questions; on the other hand do not give a prepared exposition. Try to answer the question as it is put, remembering that you are engaged in an academic conversation.

3.7 Be prepared to justify your ideas and conclusions. If the examiners challenge your interpretation but you feel that your case is a good one, muster your arguments and be willing to present your case firmly but courteously. However, if the examiners have identified a genuine weakness, concede the point gracefully. Even if you feel the examiners

¹ Taken in part with the kind permission of the author and Liverpool University, from *Preparing for your Viva* by Martin Stanistreet, 1988 and reprinted 1996.

are unreasonably critical do not become argumentative or allow the discussion to become heated. You can agree to differ and to reconsider the point. If you make any comments to your examiners which put them under moral pressure (eg alluding to the consequences of failure for you) or if you offer any incentive to your examiners to pass you, they must terminate the examination and report to the Chair of the Research Degrees Committee via Research Degrees in the Student and Registry Services.

4 After the viva examination

4.1 Your examiners can make one of a number of recommendations, all of which are set out at sections 1.5.1 (PhD/EngD), 1.5.2 (MPhil) and 1.5.3 (MD(Res)) of the *MPhil and PhD Degrees Regulations and Procedures* (at <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/srs/academic-manual/c5/research-degrees/oral-examination#top>). You may be told the outcome of the viva examination informally on the day of the examination but this will not necessarily be the case.

4.2 Full details on the possible outcomes of the examination and any further action you may need to take are given at https://www.ucl.ac.uk/students/exams-and-assessments/research-assessments/viva#Outcome_of_the_examination

4.3 You will receive an official letter confirming the award of your degree from Student and Registry Services once you have submitted the final copies of your thesis and the examiners have confirmed that any corrections to the thesis required by them have been made.

ADVICE FOR EXAMINERS

5 Role of Research Degree Examiners

5.1 Research degree examiners are appointed by UCL to ensure that, between them, the candidate has met the standard for the award of a research degree. The external examiner, together with the internal examiner, ensures that the thesis meets the nationally recognised academic standard for a doctoral degree in their discipline and satisfies the criteria for the award of a degree as set out in the joint report (see item 5.2). The internal examiner is also expected to ensure that the UCL academic and procedural norms and standards for a doctoral level degree have been satisfied.

5.2 Examiner appointments are valid for three years from the date of initial appointment. Where the viva takes place more than three years after appointment, examiners must be re-nominated using the procedures in place at the time of re-nomination. Supervisors should ensure that examiners are prepared to act before making the formal nomination.

5.3 If you believe your appointment is in breach of the examination regulations, you should contact the student's supervisor quoting the relevant criteria as soon as possible. If you have any questions about what might constitute a conflict of interest please contact the Research Degrees Student and Registry Services on researchdegrees@ucl.ac.uk.

6 Viva examination

6.1 The candidate's supervisor (or nominee) will liaise with you and the candidate to arrange and confirm a mutually convenient time and place to hold the viva examination. UCL expects that the examination will be completed and you should submit your final joint report within three months of the dispatch of the thesis to you.

6.2 The purpose of the viva examination is to examine the candidate on the subject of the thesis and, if you wish, on subjects relevant to the thesis and the research area. In the course of the examination you should determine the extent to which the candidate's thesis meets the criteria set out in the joint report for the award of a degree. With the exception of theses re-submitted for examination, a UCL research degree can only be awarded if a viva has been conducted. For the examination of a re-submitted thesis, you should indicate whether or not you will require another viva.

6.3 The candidate can request that his or her supervisor attends the viva examination as an observer. Only the examiners, one supervisor and the candidate may be present at a viva examination and, after the examination, you should indicate in the joint report form the date of the viva examination and whether or not the supervisor was present. The supervisor does not have the right to participate in the viva but may contribute if you invite him or her to do so. You may, after your initial private discussion, consult the supervisor irrespective of whether he/she attends the viva examination, particularly if you have doubts relating to the appropriate decision to be made.

6.4 You should meet at least half an hour before the examination to discuss the strategy you propose to adopt during the viva examination and exchange and read your preliminary reports on the thesis. You must outline the plan for the viva at the outset to the candidate. During the viva examination you should seek to establish whether all the requirements for a thesis have been satisfied and that the thesis is genuinely the work of the candidate. In the interests of the candidate, UCL expects that the viva examination will be conducted in a professional and open manner.

6.5 Although there is no formal limit, typically viva examinations should last for around 2-3 hours and be a positive experience for the candidate, regardless of the examination outcome, as the examiners explore the original ideas and contribution to scholarship of the thesis. You should address the candidate respectfully and courteously, and he or she should be treated fairly and appropriately. You should not refer to the background or personal characteristics of the candidate (in particular to aspects related to age, disability, gender, race, religious belief and sexual orientation). You should seek to ensure that the candidate has the opportunity, and sufficient time, to respond to all the questions posed. You should allow the candidate a break if he or she requests this.

6.6 All viva examinations should be conducted in UCL in an office or meeting room that is fit for purpose (i.e. sufficiently large to be comfortable for several hours, affording privacy and not overly affected by noise from the outside). Most viva examinations are conducted in the principal supervisor's office.

6.7 If you or the candidate has a disability which UCL cannot accommodate, other reasonable arrangements can be made for the viva. Examination by video conference or by webcam are not normally permissible, but if there are extenuating circumstances, supervisors may apply for the suspension of regulations through Research Degrees in Student and Registry Services. You should make it clear to the student's supervisor at the time you are nominated if you require special arrangements. All applications will be considered on a case-by-case basis and should be emailed to researchdegrees@ucl.ac.uk.

6.8 If the candidate makes any comments to you which puts you under moral pressure (eg alluding to the consequences of failure) or offers any incentive to pass him or her, you must terminate the examination and report to the Chair of the Research Degrees Committee via Research Degrees in Student and Registry Services.

7 Examination reports

7.1 You are required to complete two examination reports; one independent preliminary report to be completed before the viva examination and a further joint report (see 7.2 and 7.3 below). After the viva examination you should send the joint report, together with the preliminary reports, to Research Degrees in Student and Registry Services. You should return copies of the thesis to the candidate or supervisor (usually at the viva). The examiners' reports should be sent to UCL within two working weeks of the viva. Report templates and a link to the regulations are included with the examiners' email or letter of appointment. They may also be downloaded from: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/srs/academic-manual/research-degrees/examiner-guidance>

You must submit a full set of reports on the examination, which will be sent to the candidate, supervisor and Faculty Graduate Tutor, before payment of your fees will be arranged.

7.2 Independent preliminary reports

The preliminary report identifies particular areas which you believe should be explored with the candidate during the viva along with a tentative recommendation for the result of the examination. Tentative recommendations should not be indicated to the candidate before the viva. If you have any queries about the thesis which you wish to raise with the supervisor in advance of the viva examination you may do this.

You should email your preliminary report to researchdegrees@ucl.ac.uk in advance of the viva. You should also exchange preliminary reports with each other before conducting the viva examination, before the start of the examination.

7.3 Examiners' Joint Report

The examiners' joint report confirms the official outcome of the examination, together with a narrative of the examination outcome and, if appropriate, a list of corrections to be made. This report provides confirmation, or otherwise, that the criteria for the award of a research degree have been satisfied and that the examination has been conducted in accordance with UCL regulations. The checkboxes on the joint report are intended as an *aide-mémoire* to help you construct the narrative, particularly with reference to criteria that were not met by the candidate.

Typically this report includes a rationale for your decision and should cover any key points that the candidate has been advised to address, usually with a period of three months, or any additional research requirements usually associated with a thesis that has been referred for re-submission. You may comment in the joint report on any issue where you were not satisfied or wish to bring to UCL's attention.

The permissible outcomes are noted on the report which you should sign and return to UCL, together with your preliminary reports, if not already supplied.

8 Results of the examination

There can only be one outcome noted on the joint report. Full details on the possible outcomes of the examination and any further action the candidates will need to take are given at [https://www.ucl.ac.uk/students/exams-and-assessments/research-assessments/viva#Outcome of the examination](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/students/exams-and-assessments/research-assessments/viva#Outcome%20of%20the%20examination)

8.1 Pass Result including Provisional Pass with Three Months for Minor Amendments

Both the pass result and the three months minor amendments result indicate that a doctoral level degree can be awarded by UCL, subject to the candidate submitting the required number of copies of the final version of the thesis in the correct format. The three month deadline for the candidate to submit their corrections officially starts from the date of the letter sent to the candidate with the reports, which will also indicate the name of the person designated to check the corrections. For the result of three months minor amendments, the degree will only be conferred when the person nominated to check that the corrections have been carried out to the satisfaction of the examiners confirms this to researchdegrees@ucl.ac.uk. Confirmation of this can be notified to UCL by email or by the submission of a form downloadable from http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ras/research_degrees. You may recommend a further viva examination within a specified period, but not longer than 18 months.

8.2 Referral for Re-Examination

If you refer a thesis for re-submission for examination you should note that the candidate will be expected to re-enter formally for examination on one further occasion. In such cases your joint report should include detailed guidance for the candidate and what is expected for them to achieve the standard for an award. You will then be expected to review the resubmitted thesis and you will be entitled to receive the standard fee for your professional services once you have returned a joint report (preliminary reports are not required, unless a further viva was carried out).

The maximum times permissible for the re-submission of a research thesis are as follows:

PhD/EngD/MD(Res):	18 months
MPhil:	12 months

You may recommend a shorter period of time provided you indicate this clearly on the joint report and note that UCL reserves the right to allow students the maximum permissible time. You should note that the re-examination outcomes for re-submitted theses are **limited** to the following:

For PhD Examinations:

1	Pass
2	Pass with 3 months minor amendments
3	Award MPhil (for PhD programmes)
4	Fail

For MPhil Examinations:

1	Pass
2	Pass with 3 months minor amendments

3 Fail

For EngD Examinations:

1 Pass
2 Pass with 3 months minor amendments
3 Award MRes
4 Fail

For MD(Res) Examinations:

1 Pass
2 Pass with 3 months minor amendments
3 Fail

8.3 Dispute between Examiners

If you cannot agree upon an examination outcome you should contact Research Degrees at the earliest opportunity (researchdegrees@ucl.ac.uk). UCL will appoint a third examiner who will be a suitably qualified person from outside of UCL. The conduct of the examination of a thesis under such circumstances will be approved by the Chair of UCL's Research Degrees Committee on a case-by-case basis.

UCL RESEARCH DEGREE VIVA EXAMINATION PROCESS

BEFORE THE VIVA EXAMINATION:

Step one:	Examiners nominated and appointed by UCL – Examination Guidance Report templates attached to email or letter of appointment
Step two:	Thesis Submitted for Examination
Step three:	Thesis posted to examiners
Step four:	The date and location of the viva examination organised by the principal supervisor or nominee
Step five:	Examiners each prepare a preliminary report identifying particular areas to be explored with the candidate during the viva examination along with a tentative recommendation for the result of the examination and send this to researchdegrees@ucl.ac.uk .
Step six:	Examiners should exchange preliminary reports with each other before conducting the viva examination, normally just prior to the start.

VIVA EXAMINATION TAKES PLACE
One supervisor may be present as an observer

AFTER THE VIVA EXAMINATION:

Step seven:	After the viva examination, the examiners prepare a joint report. Signed copies of both are sent to UCL within two working weeks of the examination together with any claim for expenses. NB Payment for examiners is only initiated once a full set of reports has been received.
Step eight:	If three month minor amendments are required, the person nominated to check that the corrections are satisfactory should be specified on the joint report form.
Step nine:	If the thesis is referred for re-submission, examiners should indicate if another viva examination is required. The maximum period for re-submission is specified on the joint report for each degree, although for PhD/EngD degrees examiners can stipulate a shorter period of time.
Step ten:	Other examination outcomes, such as the award of an MPhil for a PhD are processed by UCL on a case-by-case basis.

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