



## EXAMINATION PROCEDURES FOR RESEARCH DEGREES - ADVICE FOR EXAMINERS

### Summary of Research Degree examination process

#### Before the viva examination

1. Examiners nominated and appointed by UCL. A link to guidance and examination report forms will be included in the appointment email.
2. Thesis submitted for examination.
3. Thesis emailed (or posted by special request) to examiners by the Research Degrees team.
4. The date and location of the viva examination organised by the principal supervisor or nominee [*should be within 3 months of receiving thesis*].
5. Examiners each prepare an individual 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 email this to [Research Degrees](#) before the viva takes place.

#### On the viva examination day

6. Examiners should exchange individual preliminary reports with each other and decide the strategy to adopt during the viva examination.
7. Viva examination takes place.

#### After the viva examination

8. Examiners prepare a joint report. Signed copies must be sent to [Research Degrees](#) **within two working weeks** of the viva examination together with any claim for expenses.
9. Payment for examiners is made once Research Degrees receive a full set of reports.
10. If minor amendments are required, the agreed approver must be named on the joint report form. Students must submit amendments to the named approver within three months. Corrections must be confirmed by the named approver to [Research Degrees](#) within one month of receipt.
11. 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.
12. Other examination outcomes are processed on a case-by-case basis.
13. An award is not conferred until the candidate submits the final corrected copy of the thesis to the [UCL Library](#).

## 1 Role of Research Degree Examiners

1.1 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. As examiners, you will ensure that the thesis meets the nationally recognised academic standard for a doctoral degree in your discipline and satisfies the criteria for the award of a degree. You will confirm this by submitting a joint report on the examination. If appointed as an internal examiner, you are also expected to ensure that the UCL academic and procedural norms and standards for a doctoral level degree are met.

1.2 Examiner appointments are valid for three years from the date of initial appointment. Where the viva takes place more than three years after appointment, you will need to be nominated again using the procedures in place at the time of re-nomination. The candidate's supervisor should ensure that you are prepared to act as an examiner before making the formal nomination. If your circumstances or contact details change at any stage, please update the Research Degrees Team immediately.

1.3 If you believe your appointment is in breach of the examination regulations, you should contact the student's supervisor to explain this as soon as possible. If you have any questions about what might constitute a conflict of interest, please contact the [Research Degrees](#) team.

## 2. Viva examination

### *Before viva day*

**2.1 Setting date:** The candidate's supervisor (or nominee) will liaise with you and the candidate to arrange and confirm a convenient time and place to hold the viva examination. You must not liaise with the candidate before the examination. You should aim to complete the examination and submit your final joint report within three months of receiving the thesis.

**2.2 Objective:** 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. 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. Unless you are reviewing a re-submitted thesis, you must hold a viva examination. For the examination of a re-submitted thesis, please liaise with the candidate's supervisor if you require a second viva.

**2.3 Attendees:** 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 (see point 2.3.1 for the exception). 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 take part in the viva but may contribute if you invite them 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.

**2.3.1 Viva Chairs:** Only candidates registered at the Institute of Education will normally have a Viva Chair appointed to oversee the viva. The Centre for Doctoral Education at the Institute of Education will liaise with examiners to confirm the arrangements. Under exceptional circumstances, e.g. where the candidate is a member of staff and there could be a conflict of interest, candidates in other UCL Faculties may also appoint a Viva Chair.

**2.4 Plagiarism:** If you find a potential case of plagiarism by the candidate, you must raise this with [Research Degrees](#) as soon as possible and ask for further advice. UCL's guidance on plagiarism is detailed in the [Academic Manual, section 5.6 - Research Misconduct](#).

### ***On the day***

**2.5 Pre-viva meeting:** You should meet at least half an hour before the examination to discuss your preliminary reports on the thesis and the strategy you propose to adopt during the viva examination. 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.

**2.6 Length of viva:** 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.

**2.7 Location of viva:** If taking place in person, viva examinations should be conducted at UCL or another university. It must be 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). Please see point 2.10 below for guidance on remote vivas.

**2.8 Conduct during viva:** You should address the candidate respectfully and courteously, and they 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 they request this. If there is a SoRA in place, you must adhere to the agreed conditions of the SoRA.

**2.8.1** If you are unhappy with the conduct of your fellow examiner or the student during the viva, you may ask for a temporary break while you seek advice from the Departmental Graduate Tutor, supervisor, departmental research administrator or Research Degrees team. It may be that the viva can then continue and you report

your concerns formally afterwards, or that the viva is stopped while further action is taken.

**2.8.2** If the candidate makes any comments to you which puts you under moral pressure (alluding to the consequences of their failure, for instance) or offers you any incentive to pass them, you must terminate the examination and report this to the Chair of the Research Degrees Committee via [Research Degrees](#).

**2.9 Post-viva:** The examiners should confer privately after the viva and then may give the candidate a preliminary outcome in person. See Section 4 below for potential outcomes for candidates.

If you have an annotated copy of the thesis (either electronic or in print), this can be given to the candidate or supervisor (usually at the viva).

You should email reports (as detailed in section 3 below) to [Research Degrees](#) **within two weeks** so that the candidate can receive the formal outcome and start any corrections, if relevant.

**2.10 Remote viva guidance:** If the viva is taking place remotely, both examiners, the supervisor and the student should agree to the arrangements (including whether the viva can be recorded) by email prior to the viva. The viva may be recorded (the pre-viva and post-viva discussions between examiners should not be recorded) to help mitigate any issues arising as a result of the unusual circumstances. The recording should be kept (it is recommended the supervisor hold this) until the successful award of the degree and must then be deleted; it does not need to be submitted centrally. You should note the viva arrangements on the joint report form. Should a serious IT issue occur, you will need to arrange to continue the viva at a later time or date.

**2.11 Reasonable adjustments:** If you require special arrangements for the viva, please make it clear to the candidate's supervisor at the time you are nominated as it may be necessary to align the candidate's needs with yours. If the candidate has a Statement of Reasonable Adjustment (SoRA), the supervisor will make you aware of this and it must be taken into account when preparing for the viva.

### **3 Examination reports**

#### **3.1 Summary of reports to complete**

You will need to complete two signed examination reports:

- **[Individual preliminary report](#):** to be completed and signed before the viva examination and emailed to [Research Degrees](#)
- **[Joint report](#):** to be completed and signed after and emailed to [Research Degrees](#) **within two weeks after the viva**

If you did not send your preliminary report beforehand, you must send it with the joint report, although this could be considered a procedural irregularity if a complaint were to be made by the student for any aspect of the examination.

All completed reports will be sent to the candidate, their principal supervisor and the Faculty Graduate Tutor after the viva so you should write the reports appropriately for this audience. The Departmental Graduate Tutor will also receive the reports where the outcome is not a pass or minor revisions to follow up if necessary. Your fee for the examination will be paid after the Research Degrees team receive your reports.

### **3.2 Individual preliminary reports**

The preliminary report identifies particular areas which you believe should be explored with the candidate during the viva and, if possible, a tentative recommendation for the result of the examination. Any recommendation 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 [Research Degrees](#) in advance of the viva. You should also exchange preliminary reports with the other examiner before starting the viva examination (see section 2.5 above).

### **3.3 Examiners' Joint Report**

The examiners' joint report confirms:

- official outcome of the examination (as permitted under UCL's regulations, as noted on the report)
- narrative of the examination outcome including a rationale for your decision
- if appropriate, a list of corrections to be made and any key points that you advise the candidate to address
- any issues you wish to bring to UCL's attention

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 to help you construct the narrative, particularly with reference to criteria that were not met by the candidate. You must only complete the relevant checkboxes. These are intended as a guide for you and the candidate and must reflect the outcome of the viva.

See Section 4 below for further guidance on outcomes and how to include corrections in your report, if applicable.

You must sign and return the report by email to [Research Degrees](#).

## **4 Results of the examination**

You may only note one outcome on the joint report. Full details on the possible outcomes of the examination and any further action the candidate will need to take are given in the [Academic Manual](#) and are outlined on the joint report.

### **4.1 Pass**

If you confirm the result of a pass with no further amendments necessary, we will award the degree once the candidate has submitted the final version of the thesis as instructed.

#### **4.2 Provisional pass with three months for minor amendments**

If you confirm a result of minor amendments, you must indicate on the joint report form who will check the corrections. This should normally be the internal examiner but may be either or both examiners or the supervisor. Please note that your decision could inadvertently delay the award to a student so please plan this carefully. The named approver should liaise with the candidate to confirm the format in which they wish to see the corrections. The student is responsible for sending the corrections directly to the named approver.

The deadline for the candidate to submit any corrections to the named approver starts from the date Research Degree emails your reports to the candidate.

The named approver should confirm the corrections are satisfactory and that the award may be made by email to [Research Degrees](#). You must do this **within one month** of the date the candidate sends you the corrections. If the named approver does not complete this within the deadline, the approval of corrections may be transferred to the supervisor or another internal UCL staff member.

We will award the degree once the named approver confirms these amendments are satisfactory and once the candidate has submitted the final corrected version of the thesis as instructed.

#### **4.3 Referral for re-submission of thesis in a revised form**

If you refer a thesis for re-submission, the candidate will be expected to re-enter for the examination and formally resubmit a revised thesis to the [Research Degrees team](#). Candidates must not email a re-submitted thesis directly to you.

Your joint report should include detailed guidance for the candidate on what is expected for them to achieve the standard for an award. You will then be expected to review the resubmitted thesis to check whether it has satisfied the points in the guidance following the original exam. You may not set further conditions at this point in the exam. Both examiners should re-confer and submit a new joint report. New preliminary reports are not required for a resubmission, unless you carry out a second viva. You will be entitled to receive a further fee once you have returned a second joint report.

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

PhD/EngD/MD(Res)/DPA	18 months
MPhil/EdD/Professional Doctorates	12 months

You may recommend a shorter period provided you indicate this clearly on the joint report and note that UCL's regulations allow students the maximum permissible time.

Please note that UCL's regulations only allow certain outcomes after a re-submission and that a further resubmission is not permitted. These are detailed on the relevant joint report form for the examination.

#### **4.4 Dispute between Examiners**

If you cannot agree on the outcome of the examination, you should contact [Research Degrees](#) as soon as possible. UCL will appoint a third examiner who will be a suitably qualified person from outside 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.