



## EXAMINATION PROCEDURES FOR RESEARCH DEGREES - ADVICE FOR EXAMINERS

### 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.

**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 in Student and Registry Services.

**1.4** A step-by-step guide to UCL's procedures is given at the end of this document.

### 2. Viva examination

**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** Candidates registered at the Institute of Education will have a Viva Chair appointed to oversee the viva. The Centre for Doctoral Education at the Institute of Education will liaise with you to confirm the arrangements.

**2.4 Plagiarism:** If you find a potential case of plagiarism by the candidate, you should raise this with [Research Degrees](#) as soon as possible. Usually, we recommend that you note this in your preliminary reports and ask the candidate for clarification during the viva. 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 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). 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 must comply with [UCL's Policy on Bullying and Harassment](#). 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.

**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 DGT, 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:** You should confer privately after the viva and may give the candidate a preliminary outcome in person. See section 4 below for potential outcomes for candidates.

You should return printed copies of the thesis to the candidate or supervisor (usually at the viva if held in person).

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 to help mitigate any issues arising as a result of the unusual circumstances. The recording should be kept 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 or the candidate has a disability which UCL cannot accommodate, other reasonable arrangements can be made for the viva. 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. If you require special arrangements for the viva, please make it clear to the student's supervisor at the time you are nominated.

## **3 Examination reports**

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

You will need to complete two signed examination reports: one independent preliminary report to be completed before the viva examination, and a further joint report (see 3.2 and 3.3 below).

Please email your signed preliminary reports to [Research Degrees](#) before the viva and the signed joint report to [Research Degrees](#) **within two weeks after the viva**. If you have not sent your preliminary report beforehand, you should then send it with the joint report.

report templates and a link to the regulations are included with the email sent to confirm your appointment. You may also download these from [our guidance pages linked to the Academic Manual](#).

The completed joint report and both preliminary reports will be sent to the candidate, their supervisor and the Faculty Graduate Tutor. The Departmental Graduate Tutor will also receive the reports where the outcome is not a pass or minor revisions. Your fee for the examination will be paid after the Research Degrees team receive your reports.

### **3.2 Independent 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 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 to help you construct the narrative, particularly with reference to criteria that were not met by the candidate. You must complete all the relevant checkboxes.

Typically this report includes a rationale for your decision and should cover any key points that you advise the candidate to address. You may comment in the joint report on any issue where you were not satisfied or wish to bring to UCL's attention.

The outcomes permitted under UCL's regulations are noted on the report. You must sign this and return 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](#).

### **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 required number of copies of 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 which examiner will check the corrections. Alternatively, you may decide that you both check or delegate this to the candidate's supervisor. The named approver should liaise with the candidate to confirm the format in which they wish to see the corrections.

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

You 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.

We will award the degree once the named approver confirms these amendments are satisfactory and once the candidate has submitted the required number of copies of the final 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.

## Summary of Research Degree examination process

### Before the viva examination

1. Examiners nominated and appointed by UCL – link to guidance and examination report forms included in appointment email
2. Thesis submitted for examination
3. Thesis dispatched to examiners
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 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 [Research Degrees](#).
6. Examiners should exchange preliminary reports with each other and decide the strategy to adopt during the viva examination.

### Viva examination takes place

### After the viva examination

1. Examiners prepare a joint report. Signed copies must be sent to [Research Degrees](#) **within two working weeks** of the examination together with any claim for expenses.
2. Payment for examiners is made once we receive a full set of reports.
3. If minor amendments are required, the agreed approver must be named on the joint report form. Students must submit amendments within three months. Corrections must be confirmed within one month.
4. 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.
5. Other examination outcomes are processed on a case-by-case basis.
6. An award is not conferred until the candidate submits the final corrected copy of the thesis.