

**Guidelines on the conduct of oral examinations and related matters for examiners of
MPhil, PhD and DProf candidates**

Queries about RVC research degree examination regulations, or the requirements for award of the MPhil, PhD or DProf degrees, should be sent to exams@rvc.ac.uk

Examiner eligibility: Should there have been any changes to their circumstances since receiving notification of their appointment as an examiner that they consider would render them ineligible to act, examiners are asked to inform the Research Degrees Officer as soon as possible.

MPhil Thesis: The length of an RVC MPhil thesis should be no more than **60,000** words **including** figure legends and footnotes but **excluding** the bibliography and appendices.

PhD Thesis: The length of an RVC PhD thesis should be no more than **100,000** words **including** figure legends and footnotes but **excluding** the bibliography and appendices.

Extensions to the MPhil and PhD word limit will not be permitted.

DProf Thesis: The length of an RVC DProf thesis should normally be **no more than 30,000 words (45,000 for social sciences theses)** including figure legends and footnotes but excluding the bibliography and appendices.

If, in exceptional circumstances, an extension to the DProf word limit has been approved, confirmation of the approval will be included with the thesis.

Candidates are allowed to use the Harvard or Vancouver styles of referencing.

Preliminary independent report: After reading the thesis, and before conferring with the co-examiner(s), each examiner is asked to write an independent preliminary report. The report form should be sent to the Exams Office (exams@rvc.ac.uk) before the oral examination takes place. Examiners are asked to bring a copy of this report to the viva.

If the examiners have any doubts about the thesis being genuinely the work of the candidate, including evidence of plagiarism, they must contact the Exams Office (exams@rvc.ac.uk) immediately.

If the examiners have *any other* queries about the thesis content that they wish to raise with the supervisor in advance of the oral examination, they are at liberty to contact them directly.

Oral examination arrangements: An oral examination must be held following submission of a thesis, other than in circumstances for which provision is made in the regulations (i.e. on re-submission of a thesis following referral) or if allegations of falsification/plagiarism have been made that require investigation.

Viva voce examinations for research degrees will normally be held face-to-face at the RVC (Camden or Hawkshead campus). In circumstances where this may be logistically or otherwise practically challenging, permission may be given to conduct a viva using video conferencing facilities such as Zoom or Teams. This can be either in a hybrid format (meaning at least two participants are face-to-face in a room on campus, and one or more participants join the examination remotely) or fully online (all participants join the examination remotely, using the video conferencing technology). As the College of registration is the RVC, it is the Research Degrees Committee (RDC) at the RVC that gives permission for an oral examination to take place via video conference. Permission for the viva to take place using video conferencing facilities will be sought when supervisors submit examiner nominations for consideration by the RDC and an Independent Chair will need to be present during online or hybrid vivas.

The candidate's supervisors will not normally be present at the oral examination, but one supervisor may attend if requested by the candidate and if the examiners and the supervisor themselves agree.

No persons other than the examiners, one supervisor and the candidate will attend the oral examination unless the examiners have been notified that an Independent Chair will be present.

At the time of their appointment examiners will have been advised of any special arrangements for a candidate with physical and/or learning differences. If they should be contacted directly by the candidate's supervisor or the candidate themselves about a disability at any stage in the examination process, even if it is in confidence, they should seek further clarification from the Exams Office to ensure they are fully briefed.

See page 4 for further information about the conduct of oral examinations

Outcomes of the examination: The options open to the examiners in determining the result of the research degree examination are set out in the joint report form. A copy will be sent to both examiners before the oral examination.

The joint report should have regard to the requirements of a thesis for the MPhil, PhD or DProf degree (see Research Degree Examination Regulations). It should not cross-refer to the examiners' preliminary reports unless they wish the candidate to be sent a copy. *See page 5 for further information about the content of the joint report*

The examiners are asked to agree between themselves at the end of the oral examination the arrangements for drafting and finalising their joint report and for sending it to the Exams Office (exams@rvc.ac.uk).

Please note that although the candidate is not sent the examiners' preliminary reports, they may ask to see them and will certainly do so in the event of an appeal against the examination outcome.

Notifying the candidate of the examination outcome: At the conclusion of the oral examination the candidate and the supervisor (if present) should withdraw and the examiners should initially confer together on the result in private. *The examiners have discretion, after the initial private discussion, to consult the supervisor irrespective of whether they were present at the oral, particularly if they have doubts relating to the appropriate decision to be made.*

If the examiners reach a unanimous decision and there are no unresolved anomalies, they may convey the decision verbally to the candidate straight away.

Examination of Re-entry Candidates

The original examiners are expected to examine the candidate on re-entry, whether for the PhD, the MPhil or the DProf degree, unless there is a good reason why this is not possible.

In examining a re-entry candidate the examiners should have regard to the report they made on the first examination, copies of which can be made available to them.

If the examiners deferred their decision on whether the candidate should be re-examined orally until after reading the revised thesis (see page 5), they are asked to inform the Exams Office (exams@rvc.ac.uk) of their decision as soon as possible after having done so.

Apart from an oral examination not being a requirement, the re-entry examination for the MPhil, PhD and DProf degrees is subject to the same rules and procedures as the original examination and all the recommendations set out in the joint report are available to the examiners. Examiners can recommend another referral to revise and re-submit the thesis, but they are advised to be cautious about doing so, and in particular to consider the currency of the research if it is to be re-examined after a further 18-month period.

Examiners' Fees and Expenses: A fee of £150 (gross of tax) is paid to each MPhil, PhD or DProf examiner following the initial examination *and* any subsequent re-entry examination after a referral. The standard rate of income tax will be deducted from the gross fee before it is paid to UK citizens unless they are tax exempt. Examiners from outside the UK will be paid the fee gross of tax and are responsible for declaring the additional income for tax purposes. Payment is authorised automatically on receipt of the examiners' joint report.

Examiners external to the University of London and its Colleges may claim travel and other expenses in accordance with the relevant schedules. Claims should be submitted to the Exams Office (exams@rvc.ac.uk) at the conclusion of the examination.

Equal Opportunities: All examinations of the RVC are subject to the Equal Opportunities Policy, copies of which are available from the Exams Office.

Appeals Procedure: The RVC has a procedure for the consideration of appeals by candidates for Research Degrees. This is available on request from the Exams Office.

Further information

Conduct of the oral examination

The purpose of the oral examination is to examine the candidate on the subject of the thesis and, if the examiners see fit, on related topics. Before the oral begins, the examiners should discuss the strategy they propose to adopt and, at its outset, outline this to the candidate.

During the oral examination the examiners should seek to establish whether all the requirements for a thesis submitted for the MPhil, PhD or DProf degrees have been met (these are set out in the Research Degree Examination Regulations), and that the thesis content is genuinely the work of the candidate.

There are no set requirements for the conduct of an oral examination, nor the duration. However, the examination must be conducted in such a way as to provide the candidate with adequate opportunity, encouragement and time to explain his/her research and to defend the thesis content. It is recommended that, during a long oral examination, examiners should allow short break(s) at appropriate point(s).

The supervisor, if present, does not have the right to participate in the examination and should only contribute if invited to do so by the examiners.

If the candidate becomes so unwell or distressed during the oral examination as to be unable to proceed, the examiners should, after such consultation with the candidate and supervisor as is possible at that time, decide whether or not to continue. If they do continue, they should note in the joint report that the candidate became unwell. If they decide not to, they should determine whether they have sufficient evidence to allow a decision about the examination outcome to be taken or whether it will be necessary to hold the oral examination on another occasion.

If the candidate makes any comments to the examiners which put them under moral pressure (e.g. alluding to the consequences of failure) or offers any kind of incentive to the examiners to pass them, the examination should be terminated immediately. The Exams Office should be informed straightaway and a written report sent to the College's Academic Registrar via the Exams Office (exams@rvc.ac.uk).

In addition to examining the candidate orally, the examiners have the discretion to examine them by means of written papers or a practical examination. This provision is rarely invoked and examiners are asked to contact the Exams Office if they wish to do so.

Notifying the Candidate

It is recognised that examiners may wish to advise a candidate {verbally} of their decision after the oral examination, particularly if they have passed, or will pass subject to making minor amendments to the thesis. In doing so, examiners are advised to make it quite clear to the candidate that the result is unofficial at this stage and that it will only become official/final when they have been notified in writing by the Exams Office. Official notification will be sent only after the examiners have submitted their joint report and any requirements {e.g. thesis amendments} have been satisfied.

Please note that MPhil, PhD and DProf degrees are formally awarded on the last day of each month. In order for the degree to be awarded to the candidate in a particular month all the examiners' reports and the final corrected, electronic copy of the thesis must have been received by the Exams Office by the last day of the month in question.

Joint examiners' report

If the examiners recommend that the candidate must make major amendments to a thesis within 6 months, they should indicate clearly, although not necessarily in detail, the required revisions.

If the candidate fails to satisfy the examiners but is permitted to revise and re-submit their thesis for the degree within 18 months, they should indicate the way(s) in which the thesis fails to satisfy the requirements for the degree. They should also indicate clearly, although not necessarily in detail, the required revisions.

Such candidates may be exempted from a further oral examination on re-presentation of their thesis. The examiners must indicate in the joint report whether or not an oral is required. **However, they may wish to reserve judgement until they have read the revised thesis and should state this on the form.**

If the examiners decide that the criteria for an MPhil rather than a PhD have been, or might be, satisfied they should:

- (i) indicate the basis for their decision not to allow re-submission for the PhD
and
- (ii) should indicate in a positive way how the requirements for a thesis for the MPhil (set out in the Research Degree Examination Regulations) are satisfied **or** (if they are recommending that the thesis be revised and re-submitted for examination for the MPhil degree) how the criteria for the MPhil might be satisfied.

[The MPhil Degree of the University of London is an award in its own right and may not be awarded unless the criteria for that degree are satisfied. It is not awarded as compensation for a failed PhD.]

If the examiners' decision is to fail the candidate outright, they should indicate the basis for their decision to reject all the other options open to them.