



Examiners guide to the PhD examination process

Contents

1. Eligibility to examine.....	1
2. Invitation to examine.	1
3. Receiving the thesis.	1
4. Queries about the thesis.	1
5. Timetable for the examination.	2
6. Confidentiality.	2
7. The independent chair.	2
8. Information, guides and documents made available to examiners.....	4
9. Special access arrangements.....	4
10. Preliminary reports.	4
11. The oral examination (Viva).	5
12. Getting to an in-person viva.....	5
13. Applying to park on campus for an in-person viva.	5
14. Receiving the link to the viva taking place or being recorded in Teams.	5
15. Participation by Teams – On the day of the viva.	6
16. Viva recording.....	6
17. The result of the examination.	6
18. Resubmission outcome.	7
19. Examination of students who are resubmitting.....	8
20. What to do if the examiners do not agree or need further assistance.	8
21. Reporting the results of the examination to the candidate	8
22. Post viva corrections.	9
23. Payment of examiner fees and expenses.	9
24. Equal opportunities.	9
25. Appeals procedure.	9

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1. Eligibility to examine.

On invitation, examiners are asked to confirm to the Doctoral School (doctoralschool@royalholloway.ac.uk) if they have had any connections with either the candidate they are examining or their supervisor/advisor which they believe would make it desirable for Royal Holloway to reconsider the appropriateness of their appointment.

These connections could be either personal or professional. For example, it is considered that an individual who has collaborated with the candidate on a joint published paper would be an inappropriate choice as they would have played a significant part in advising the candidate. Examiners from within Royal Holloway should not have been a member of the student's supervisory team (including advisor) and should not have played a part in any progression reviews.

2. Invitation to examine.

The candidate's supervisor will contact and informally invite examiners. The Doctoral School will formally write to the examiner by email once the Director for postgraduate education has approved the examiner team nominations.

We ask that examiners respond to the Doctoral School invitation, regardless of whether they have informally agreed with the candidate's supervisor. Please respond confirming in line with the eligibility criteria and other questions posed in the invitation.

On accepting their invitation to examine, examiners who are not members of Royal Holloway staff will be asked to confirm or provide banking information and other details, so that they can be set up in the Finance system. This in readiness to receive their examiner fee and any expenses after the viva has taken place. See [Guide for the payment of PGR examiner fees and expenses](#)

3. Receiving the thesis.

Provided the examination team have accepted their invitations from the Doctoral School, the thesis and a covering email will be sent by the Doctoral School shortly after it is received from the candidate. The thesis should not be sent directly by the candidate or supervisor.

The thesis will be sent as an attachment to the email along with links to all guides, the declaration of words and relevant forms. If the thesis file is too large to send as an email attachment, the examiner will receive a link to access a secure folder in SharePoint where they can then view and download the file. Access is then granted via email activation from Microsoft. We recommend checking for these in Spam or clutter folders. Royal Holloway examiners may not need to take the activation step.

4. Queries about the thesis.

If examiners have any queries about the thesis, they should either raise these via the Doctoral School or at the viva. If the examiners have any queries about Royal Holloway's requirements for the award of MPhil/PhD and about the Research Degree regulations, they should also contact the Doctoral School.

Once the examines are officially appointed they should receive no communication from either the candidate or the supervisor regarding the first submission and resubmission examination. The supervisor will however make contact to make arrangements for the viva.

If an examiner has any queries about the process, they should not hesitate to email doctoralschool@royalholloway.ac.uk .

Any communication, especially that relating to the thesis, may be considered a breach of the Research Degree Regulations. If an examiner is contacted by either the supervisor or the candidate, they should notify the Doctoral School.

5. Timetable for the examination.

In the interest of the candidate, Royal Holloway expects that the examination will be completed, and that the examiners will have submitted their Viva Outcome Report Form to the Doctoral School within 3 months of the dispatch of the thesis to the examiners. If there is difficulty in complying with this request, the Doctoral School (doctoralschool@royalholloway.ac.uk) should be informed.

6. Confidentiality.

All matters relating to the final examination and thesis content must be treated as confidential. Examiners are not permitted to divulge the content of previously unpublished material contained in a student's thesis until such time as the thesis has been placed in the public domain.

7. The independent chair.

It is a regulatory requirement that all vivas are conducted in the presence of an Independent Chair and are recorded.

Criteria for the appointment of an Independent Chair

1. The Independent Chair will normally be a member of Royal Holloway academic staff
2. The Independent Chair will not be a member of the candidate's supervisory team (including advisor) and will not have played any significant part in the project including progression review or assessment.
3. The Independent Chair will have had experience of supervising at least one Research Degree student through to completion.
4. It is expected that the Independent Chair will normally have had experience of conducting at least two Research Degree viva voce examinations as an examiner.
5. The Independent Chair will be familiar with the Royal Holloway Research Degree examining process, procedures and [regulations](#).

Roles and responsibilities of the Independent Chair

The role of an Independent Chair is to:

Before the viva
Initiate Teams invites to all parties where the viva is being held and/or recorded in MS Teams
Set up and attend any trial run meetings and to test technology, connections etc
On the day of the viva
Discuss an agenda with the examiners and attend the pre-viva discussion between examiners
Introduce the examiners and candidate and outline the format of the examination to the candidate and its key purpose
Explain that the Chair has a neutral role in the assessment process and takes no part in the actual assessment of the research.
Communicate and facilitate any special access arrangements for the viva that have been approved by the Disability and Neurodiversity team.
Ensure that if the supervisor is present that they only act as an observer and agree to maintain confidentiality in respect of the content of the examination. The supervisor will not participate in the examination of the student unless invited to contribute by the examiners.
Start the viva recording – Teams or handheld device
Oversee the oral examination to ensure that it is conducted fairly and in accordance with Royal Holloway Research Degree Regulations . For example, all main items on the agenda are addressed and that the candidate is given the opportunity to respond to all questions asked by the examiners. They should also ensure that each examiner has a proper opportunity to contribute to the examination process. Exceptionally, the Independent Chair may adjourn/suspend the viva where they have concerns about its conduct.
Ensure that the conduct of the viva provides the candidate with an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and to explain/defend their work. Intervene if it is felt that the candidate needs a break. For example, where the viva lasts more than 2 hours, the candidate becomes distressed or unwell, or where the candidate has special access requirements.
At the end of the questioning period, asking whether both examiners are satisfied that they have enough information to come to an examination decision regarding the candidate. If they agree, then the Independent Chair should ask the student whether they have any points they would like to raise.
Stop the viva recording

After the viva
Ensure that the candidate (and supervisor, if applicable) is asked to withdraw from the meeting before the examiners begin their final deliberations.
Where necessary, help mediate between the examiners to identify possible recommendations and facilitate an agreed outcome , but not to provide any academic assessment.
Once the examiners have deliberated, ensure that the actions required of the candidate and the examiners are clear and understood by all parties e.g. that the examiners must return their joint viva outcome report to the Doctoral School within two weeks of the viva
Transfer ownership of the viva recording to the Doctoral School and sends their Independent Chair report by email

The Independent Chair is not required to have any detailed knowledge of the thesis and is not involved with the examiners' assessment of the candidate, beyond advising them of the outcome options available to them in the Research Degree regulations.

8. Information, guides and documents made available to examiners.

The examiners will be sent the following.

- A link to the [Research Degree Regulations](#)
- Details of any **reasonable adjustments** to be made to the conduct of the examination under the provisions of the Regulations on Access Arrangements for Assessment (where applicable)
- Information where candidates are submitting in an **alternative format**
- **The thesis and declaration of words.** These will be sent **electronically**:
The examiners guide to the PhD examination process.
- A link to request [permission to park on campus](#) for an in person viva
- A link to the [preliminary report](#) (first submission) form for completion and return to the Doctoral School at least 48 hours before the viva. or [preliminary report](#) (for a resubmission)
- A link to the [viva outcome report \(first submission\)](#) or [resubmission outcome form \(resubmission\)](#)
- A link to the [Satisfactory completion of amendments form](#)
- A link to the [guide to the payment of PGR examiner fees and expenses](#)
- A link to the [examiner invoice form](#)

Please also see the Doctoral School website - [guidance for MPhil/PhD examiners](#)

9. Special access arrangements.

Where the candidate is registered with our Disability and Neurodiversity team, examiners will be made aware of any special access arrangements required for both the assessment of the thesis and for the viva. These will be sent where possible at the time of the thesis dispatch, or in time for the viva. The Independent Chair will ensure any requests are facilitated.

10. Preliminary reports.

Each examiner is asked to write an independent preliminary report on the thesis (the preliminary report form is made available with the thesis). It is expected that this will be written by each examiner after reading the thesis but before conferring with the co-examiner about it.

Typically, the preliminary report identifies particular areas which the examiner believes should be explored with the candidate during the oral examination, and, if possible, gives a tentative recommendation based on an assessment of the thesis, for the result of the examination. Tentative recommendations should not be indicated to the candidate in advance of the viva, which is an integral component of the examination.

The preliminary report form should be emailed to doctoralschool@royalholloway.ac.uk at least 2 working days prior to the oral examination. Where reports are received in time, from both examiners, these will be shared with the examiners and Independent Chair by the Doctoral School before the viva.

Where the thesis has been resubmitted, examiners will be guided to return the preliminary reports depending on whether a second viva is required.

11. The oral examination (Viva).

The oral examination can take place:

- In person – on Egham or London campuses
- Remotely on MS Teams
- Hybrid

Once the thesis has been dispatched, the supervisor will agree the format and date of the viva with the examiners, chair and candidate. It is the supervisor's responsibility to communicate the date, time, format and location of the viva to all parties. If the viva is taking place on MS Teams, the Independent Chair will send MS Teams invites.

12. Getting to an in-person viva.

Examiners (who are not members of Royal Holloway staff) are asked to make their own travel (and accommodation arrangements (where appropriate). The examiner fee and eligible expenses can be claimed back via invoice and from the Doctoral School. Payment is made once the joint outcome report has been received. For further information about payment of the fee and expenses see:

[Guide for the payment of PGR examiner fees and expenses](#)
[PGR examiner invoice form](#)

13. Applying to park on campus for an in-person viva.

Examiners attending an in-person viva can send vehicle registration details to the Doctoral School via [this form](#). This should be requested at least 2 working days ahead of the viva. Please note this is permission to park on campus only and parking spaces cannot be reserved.

A map of all car parks can be viewed and downloaded [here](#)

Getting to [Egham Campus](#)
[Information about London Campus](#)

14. Receiving the link to the viva taking place or being recorded in Teams.

The Independent Chair will send a meeting request or link via Teams. Having clicked 'join meeting' on the invite, it will open MS Teams in your browser suggesting you download the app. Ignore this and click the button 'Join on the Web instead'.

Members of the Doctoral School will be invited to the Teams meeting. They will not attend the viva, this is just for post-viva monitoring and help with the transfer of the recording.

The Independent Chair may suggest a trial run in the days before the viva to check connection and that technology is running satisfactorily.

15. Participation by Teams – On the day of the viva.

Examiners can join the meeting by clicking on the link sent by the Independent Chair. The chair may need to let them in.

The independent chair will:

- Ensure that the participants are able to contact each other by phone if a technical problem should arise.
- Ask the candidate to show on the camera that they are in a room on their own.
- If the candidate has requested that their supervisor is not present at the viva and neither the internal examiner nor the Independent Chair know the candidate, the Independent Chair should ask the candidate to show the examiners some official ID (e.g. passport / driving licence / EU ID card)
- Allow plenty of time before the viva is scheduled to begin for everyone to log in and to confirm they are comfortable with operating the technology e.g. make sure that the participants are aware of the Share option on the toolbar, which allows them to share a section of the thesis that they wish to focus on

16. Viva recording.

In accordance with the Research Degree regulations, the viva will be recorded and in the presence of an Independent Chair.

Fully remote and hybrid vivas will be recorded in MS Teams and in person vivas may be recorded on a handheld audio device loaned by the Doctoral School or in MS Teams. In both instances this is the responsibility of the Independent Chair.

Only the viva discussion will be recorded and no pre or post viva discussion. Immediately after the viva, the ownership of the recording is transferred to the Doctoral School. This will only be accessed on the event of an appeal and only by selected members of University staff.

17. The result of the examination.

After the examination, examiners are asked to email the joint [Viva Outcome Report form](#). Any amendments required should be set out clearly on the Viva Outcome Report form. This report should be emailed to the Doctoral School **within two weeks** of the oral examination.

The Viva Outcome Report should have regard to the requirements of a thesis for the MPhil/PhD as set out in the [Research Degree regulations](#).

Outcome options are summarised on the [viva outcome report](#) but will be considered as follows:

The candidate has satisfied the criteria for the degree of PhD
To satisfy the examiners in the examination of the degree of the PhD, the candidate is required to make specified minor amendments to the examiners' satisfaction within 3 months
To satisfy the examiners in the examination of the degree of the PhD, the candidate is required to make amendments to address errors of substance or omission to the examiners' satisfaction within 9 months

The candidate is permitted to re-enter for the examination of the PhD degree and to re-present the thesis in a revised form within 18 months . There is the option of with/without a second viva
The candidate is permitted to re-enter for the oral examination on the same thesis and within 18 months
The candidate has satisfied the criteria for the award of the degree of MPhil and should be awarded this degree
To satisfy the requirements for the degree of MPhil , the candidate is required to make specified minor amendments to the examiners' satisfaction within 3 months
To satisfy the requirements for the degree of MPhil , the candidate is required to make specified amendments to address errors of substance or omission to the examiners' satisfaction within 9 months
The candidate is permitted to enter the examination for the MPhil and to re- present the thesis in a revised form within 12 months . There is the option of with/without/a second viva
The candidate has not satisfied the criteria for the degree of PhD or MPhil and will not be permitted to re-enter for the examination for the MPhil/PhD

A more detailed list of the outcome options available can be found from section 17 of the [Research Degree regulations](#)

18. Resubmission outcome.

If the examiners decide to refer the candidate to revise and resubmit the thesis for the PhD in 18 months, they should indicate on the Viva Outcome Report form that the current thesis fails to satisfy the requirements for the MPhil/PhD degree and should indicate clearly, although not necessarily in detail, the revisions which they consider should be made.

The examiners should indicate one of the following on the Viva Outcome Report form

1. They will definitely require an oral on the resubmitted thesis.
2. They have agreed that it will definitely not be necessary to conduct an oral on the revised thesis.
3. They wish to reserve their position until they have read the revised thesis.

If the examiners decide that the criteria for the MPhil have been, or might be satisfied by a PhD candidate, they should indicate in their Final Joint Report the basis for their decision not to allow resubmission for the PhD and should indicate in a positive way how the requirements for a thesis for the MPhil (set out in the regulations for the MPhil and PhD Degrees) are satisfied or if they are recommending that the thesis be revised and resubmitted for examination for the MPhil degree, how the criteria for the MPhil might be satisfied.

Please note that the MPhil Degree is an award in its own right and may not be awarded unless the criteria for that degree are satisfied; it is not to be 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.

The preliminary reports will not normally be made available to the student, so we ask examiners not refer to the preliminary reports in the Viva Outcome Report. Where digital signatures cannot be added to our documents, typed signatures will be accepted if confirmed by email.

19. Examination of students who are resubmitting.

Unless it is impossible for them to do so, it is usual that the original examiners will examine the candidate on re-entry whether to the PhD or to the MPhil.

In examining a re-entry candidate, the examiners should have regard to the report they made on the first examination, copies of which will be sent to them with the resubmitted thesis.

Examiners have discretion about whether to hold an oral examination on a revised and resubmitted thesis but will need to have regard to any statement they have made about this on the Viva Outcome Report form on the original examination.

When the revised thesis is dispatched to the examiners, the supervisor is asked to contact the examiners to ask if an oral is required and, if so, to arrange as necessary with an independent Chair.

Examiners are asked to write their independent Preliminary Report on the resubmitted thesis before conferring with their co-examiner. Please note that Preliminary Reports are always required for a resubmission examination regardless of whether a second viva is held and must be written and submitted to the Doctoral School prior to examiners conferring on the resubmitted thesis.

The resubmission examination for the MPhil/PhD is subject to the same regulations and procedures as the original examination apart from the following:

An oral examination is discretionary.

If a second oral examination is required, the Resubmission Outcome Report should be submitted to the Doctoral School within two weeks of the oral examination. If a second oral examination is not required, the Resubmission Outcome Report should be submitted to the Doctoral School within three months of receipt of the resubmitted thesis.

There are fewer options open to the examiners in determining the result of a resubmission. These are set out in the Research Degree regulations. In summary, they are:

1. Pass the level entered for.
2. Pass the level entered for, subject to minor amendments to be completed and checked by one or both examiners within 3 months.
3. Fail PhD but has met the requirements for the MPhil.
4. Fail PhD but has met the requirements for the MPhil subject to minor amendments to be completed and checked by one or both examiners within 3 months.
5. Outright fail. No further entry to the PhD or MPhil degree will be allowed.

20. What to do if the examiners do not agree or need further assistance.

If the examiners fail to reach a decision or to agree, they should consult with the Doctoral School.

21. Reporting the results of the examination to the candidate

The Doctoral School are responsible for communicating the formal outcome to the candidate. They will do this on receipt of the joint outcome report from the examiners. The Doctoral School will email the candidate and make the outcome report available to them to assist with any corrections. Preliminary reports are not shared with the candidate.

22. Post viva corrections.

Candidates are asked to send corrections to the nominated examiner(s) by the agreed deadline which is also made known to the examiner(s). During the time the candidate is addressing their corrections, they are asked not to confer with the examiners. They should raise any questions via their supervisor. Once they submit the updated thesis to the nominated examiner(s) (with cc to the Doctoral School), this is considered as their completion attempt and there should be no conversation about additional or further corrections between the candidate and examiner. If the examiner is happy that the corrections have been completed to their satisfaction, they should complete and return the [satisfactory completion of amendments form](#) to the Doctoral School. The Doctoral School will update the candidate.

The date of the award is the 1st of the month following receipt of both the satisfactory completion of amendments form and approval from the Director for postgraduate education.

23. Payment of examiner fees and expenses.

The examiner fee and eligible expenses can be claimed back from the Doctoral School once the joint outcome report has been received. See:

[Guide for the payment of PGR examiner fees and expenses](#)
[PGR examiner invoice form](#)

All electronic expense receipts should be sent to along with the [invoice](#) to doctoralschool@rhul.ac.uk

Examination fees are **not** paid to members of Royal Holloway staff including emeritus. Expenses for travel to a viva in London can be claimed via Doctoral School approval, on submission of the joint exam report, using the PGR examiner invoice form. The Doctoral School will follow up with instructions on claiming the expenses in Agresso. Emeritus staff cannot claim expenses.

24. Equal opportunities.

All examinations of Royal Holloway are subject to Royal Holloway's [Equal Opportunities Policy](#). All candidates are subject to the same academic criteria and requirements.

25. Appeals procedure.

Appeals against the examiners' decision must be submitted in writing by the within 15 working days of the date on which the candidate was formally notified of the outcome of the examination.

E-mail: doctoralschool@royalholloway.ac.uk

[Doctoral School microsite](#)