

Notes for Examiners

Candidate for a Research Degree

Procedure for Examination of a candidate for a research degree

The procedure for examination is covered in detail in the Principal Regulations for Research Degrees, which can be found at <https://www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/regulations>

Requirements of the award

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (PhD)

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy must embody the results of research carried out during the approved period of study. In the thesis and the oral examination the candidate is required to conduct and present original investigations that make a significant contribution to knowledge, to test ideas, whether the candidate's own or those of others, to understand the relationship of the theme of the investigations to a wider field of knowledge and to express themselves clearly and concisely.

In the case of a thesis involving original creative output, the thesis must embody the results of research carried out and/or output created during the approved period of study. The thesis must contain a commentary that addresses the originality and artistic relevance of the work. Within the thesis and oral examination the student must show evidence of the originality of the work, demonstrate an understanding of the relationship of the theme of the thesis to a wider field of knowledge, make a significant contribution to knowledge/the genre, and must express themselves clearly and concisely.

Word length

The maximum word length of the thesis is 80,000 words, excluding any references and bibliography. Maximum word length for a thesis including creative output may vary depending on the format of the thesis. The University of Essex does not stipulate a minimum number of words required.

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY (MPhil)

A thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Philosophy must embody the results of research carried out during the approved period of study and should make a contribution to knowledge. In the thesis and the oral examination the candidate is required to present the results of research that either forms original work or is an ordered and critical exposition of existing knowledge. The thesis should set out the relationship between the candidate's work and the wider field of knowledge, and should be expressed clearly and concisely.

In the case of a thesis involving original creative output, the thesis must embody the results of research carried out and/or output created during the approved period of study. The thesis must contain a commentary that addresses the originality and artistic relevance of the work. Within the thesis the student must show evidence of the originality of the work or an ordered and critical exposition of existing knowledge/the genre. The thesis should demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the candidate's work and the wider field of knowledge/the genre, and should be expressed clearly and concisely.

Word Length

The maximum word length of the thesis is 50,000 words, excluding any references and bibliography. Maximum word length for a thesis including creative output may vary depending on the format of the thesis. The University of Essex does not stipulate a minimum number of words required.

MASTERS BY DISSERTATION (MAD/MSD)

A dissertation for the degree of Masters by Dissertation is required to present the results of research carried out during the approved period of study and should demonstrate advanced understanding of the area of study. In the dissertation and the oral examination the candidate is required to present the results of research that either forms original work or is an ordered and critical exposition of existing knowledge. The dissertation should set out the relationship between the candidate's work and the wider field of knowledge, and should be expressed clearly and concisely.

In the case of a dissertation involving original creative output, the dissertation must embody the results of research carried out/or output created during the approved period of study and should demonstrate advanced understanding of the area of study. The dissertation must contain a commentary that addresses the originality and artistic relevance of the work. The dissertation should set out the relationship between the candidate's work and the wider field of knowledge/the genre, and should be expressed clearly and concisely.

Word Length

The maximum word length of the dissertation is 30,000 words, excluding any references and bibliography. Maximum word length for a dissertation including creative output may vary depending on the format of the dissertation. The University of Essex does not stipulate a minimum number of words required.

PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE (DOCT)

A thesis submitted for a professional doctorate must embody the results of research carried out during the approved period of study. In the thesis and the oral examination the candidate is required to conduct and present original investigations that make a significant contribution to the nature of practice within the profession or to the way theory is applied, to understand the relationship of the theme of the investigations to a wider field of knowledge and to express themselves clearly and concisely.

Word Length

The maximum word length of the thesis is 40,000 words, excluding any references and bibliography. The University of Essex does not stipulate a minimum number of words required.

Pre-viva procedures

- The candidate completes a submission form (RD1).
- The candidate submits their thesis electronically in PDF format to the Postgraduate Research Education (PGRE) Team. This will normally be contained within one document, not divided into separate PDF files.
- The length of the thesis/dissertation must not exceed the word limits specified above, including quotations but excluding any appendices and footnotes (as long as the latter does not contain substantive argument). Please note that this is a word limit, not a target. Candidates may make a case to the Dean for approval of an extension to this word limit – you will be informed if this is the case.
- The thesis/dissertation is sent simultaneously to the external and internal examiners via email. The email contains copies of the forms relating to the examination process. After reading the thesis/dissertation, the examiners are asked to independently complete their initial, individual reports on the forms accompanying the thesis/dissertation and to send them back to the PGRE Team as soon as possible. It is a requirement that these independent reports are received **at least one week before** the viva takes place, in accordance with University procedures.
- **There should be no contact between the examiners regarding the thesis/dissertation until after the initial reports have been returned and exchanged by the PGRE Team.** However, examiners may discuss logistical arrangements for the viva.

- After the PGRE Team receives both examiners' reports, the reports will be exchanged between the examiners by the PGRE Team (please do not send your report directly to the other examiner).
- The internal examiner normally arranges the viva; however, where all parties are attending via video link, the Graduate Administrator will oversee the arrangements, including setting up the viva on Zoom. This should take place no later than **two months** after the thesis has been sent to the examiners.
- The internal examiner will have received an electronic copy of the Joint Report (RD4) form, which should be completed as soon as possible after the viva and returned to the PGRE Team.

The examiners' roles

Role of the external examiner

The external examiner's duties are as follows:

- to read the thesis, or, in the case of a thesis involving original creative output, assess the work presented;
- to reach an independent judgment on the thesis, against the appropriate criteria for the award, without consulting the internal examiner about the assessment, and to record this on an Initial Report Form prior to the viva;
- to send their completed Initial Report Form to the PGRE Team **at least one week prior** to the viva;
- to attend the viva and viva pre-meeting;
- to examine the thesis together with the internal examiner;
- to come to an agreement with the internal examiner as to the outcome of the examination;
- with the internal examiner, to complete the Joint Report Form, and compile the list of corrections if required;
- in the case of a referral, normally to re-examine the referred thesis.

Role of the internal examiner

The internal examiner's duties are as follows:

- to read the thesis, or, in the case of a thesis involving original creative output, assess the work presented;
- to reach an independent judgment on the thesis, against the appropriate criteria for the award, without consulting the external examiner about the assessment, and to record this on an Initial Report Form prior to the viva;
- to send their completed Initial Report Form to the PGRE Team **at least one week prior** to the viva;
- to oversee the arrangements for the assessment process including liaising with the external examiner, and Independent Chair where necessary, to set a date for the viva;
- to ensure that the department notifies the candidate of the date for the viva;
- to oversee the proceedings at the viva in accordance with University regulations and policies;
- to examine the thesis together with the internal examiner;
- to come to an agreement with the external examiner as to the outcome of the examination;
- with the external examiner, to complete the Joint Report Form, and compile the list of corrections if required;
- in the case of a pass with corrections, to notify the PGRE Team when they have received the corrected thesis from the candidate and to assess the corrected thesis within a reasonable time period. For minor corrections this should be within two weeks and for major corrections within four weeks of receiving the corrections from the candidate.
- in the case of a referral, normally to re-examine the referred thesis.

Oral examination/Viva Voce Examination (Viva)

Purpose of the viva

The viva is a long-established part of the examination process for a research degree. The main focus of the assessment is on the written thesis, however, the viva, which is the oral part of the assessment, is used to inform the examiners' final assessment decision.

Venue

In cases where the viva is taking place in-person, the venue for the viva should normally be on campus, reasonably quiet and allow the viva to proceed without interruption.

Faculty Dean (Postgraduate) approval is required for a viva to be held at a venue outside the University of Essex or its Partner Institutions.

In cases where the viva is taking place via video link (e.g. Zoom), an equivalent suitable environment should be found by all parties, and the department must ensure that all parties have appropriate IT equipment and a confidential space to facilitate the remote viva.

Who attends?

The viva shall normally only involve the internal and external examiners, the candidate, and, if appointed, an Independent Chair.

A candidate will normally only be excused from the viva where the viva has been arranged for a re-examination following a referral period and where the examiners are in agreement that the candidate is now in a position to pass the viva, or where there are exceptional circumstances which prevent a candidate from engaging in the viva process.

Supervisor(s) are not normally permitted to be present at the viva. The candidate's supervisor can only be present in exceptional circumstances, to be approved on an individual basis by the Dean and with the agreement of the external examiner. It is good practice to invite the supervisor to attend at the end of the viva when the examiners communicate their recommendation to the candidate. The attendance of the supervisor in these circumstances is with the permission of the examiners and the candidate.

Appointment of an Independent Chair

As determined by the University Policy on the [Appointment of an Independent Chair](#), the Dean may appoint an Independent Chair to oversee the conduct of the viva.

Duration

The length of a viva will vary but if it is longer than two hours the internal examiner will recommend an adjournment for a break. It is recommended that examiners note the timings of the viva and any break taken.

Preparation by the candidate

The candidate is advised to re-read their thesis and anticipate possible areas of questioning. They should take a copy to the viva. They are advised to consult their supervisor on how best to prepare for the viva, who may arrange a mock viva. Candidates are also encouraged to attend the workshop on '*Preparing for the Viva*'.

Discussion between examiners

On the day of the viva, before seeing the candidate, the examiners should have a pre-viva meeting. At this meeting, they can discuss their initial assessment and agree the approach to the viva, including the areas of questioning. The examiners should also decide whether they wish to advise the candidate at the start of the viva of their initial assessment of the thesis.

Introductory remarks to candidate

The internal examiner shall:

- Introduce themselves and the external examiner (and the Independent Chair);
- Confirm the purpose of the viva;
- Explain anything the examiners have agreed about how they will proceed to conduct the viva;
- For a viva conducted via video link; confirm the etiquette for the viva, such as hand raising and what to do in the event of any technical issues.

The internal examiner should endeavour to establish an atmosphere in which the candidate will be able to perform to the best of their ability.

Questioning

The examiners will normally start with some general/introductory questions that are designed to put the candidate at ease. The phrasing and tone of questions should be such that the candidate is able to provide helpful clarification, and appropriate evidence and elaboration. Questioning should not be hostile or designed to 'catch the candidate out'.

Reaching a decision

Once the viva has finished, the candidate will leave the room/virtual room and the examiners will reach a decision on the recommended result.

DECISION AGREED

If the examiners agree on the decision, they will invite the candidate back in to inform them of their recommendation.

FAILURE TO AGREE

In the event of disagreement on the viva outcome, the examiners may, after due consideration between themselves, certify that their failure to agree on an outcome is irreconcilable. Two new examiners shall then be appointed. The new examiners shall examine the thesis and conduct a viva. The new examiners may recommend to the Dean any result that was open to the original examiners and their decision on the recommendation shall be final, subject only to any right of appeal that may be given under the provisions of other Regulations.

Post-viva Recommendations

Thesis by published works

The examiners for a submission by published work shall declare the result of an examination for:

- a) the degree of Doctor of Philosophy as 'pass', 'minor corrections to the summary' 'resubmission of published work on one further occasion only', 'award of Master of Philosophy' or 'fail';
- b) the degree of Master of Philosophy as 'pass', 'minor corrections to the summary' 'resubmission of published work on one further occasion only', 'award of Masters by Dissertation' or 'fail';
- c) the degree of Masters by Dissertation as 'pass', 'minor corrections to the summary' 'resubmission of published work on one further occasion only' or 'fail'.

The examiners for a submission by publication may recommend any result that is available for the degree examined (see Regulations 4.55, 4.60 or 4.71).

Please note: The following viva outcomes apply to candidates submitting on or after 03 October 2019. For the viva outcomes for candidates who submitted before 03 October 2019, please see Appendix 1.

Examination outcomes

Both examiners **MUST** complete the appropriate sections of the Joint Report (RD4) form.

Examiners may recommend **one** of the following examination outcomes on academic grounds:

- (a) **Pass subject to no corrections**
- (b) **Pass subject to minor typographical/presentational corrections.** The candidate makes any corrections prior to submission of the final version of the thesis.
- (c) **Pass subject to minor corrections to be made within three months.** The examiners must provide a list of corrections that they wish to see made. Minor corrections should not require the candidate to conduct further research or undertake substantial further work. These include typographical errors, clarifying points, rephrasing, editing/adding paragraphs, correcting references, etc. The internal examiner must confirm in writing that these have been made satisfactorily. Corrections must be made and the thesis submitted within three months.
- (d) **Pass subject to major corrections to be made within six months.** The examiners must provide a separate list of corrections that they wish to see made. Major corrections require the candidate to undertake substantial further work but the corrected thesis should not require re-examination. Such major corrections include more extensive editorial revisions, the addition of substantial new material, re-writing of substantial parts of the thesis, re-analysis of existing data, etc. The internal examiner must confirm in writing that these have been made satisfactorily. Corrections must be made and the thesis submitted within six months.
- (e) **Referral for re-examination in up to 12 months.** The candidate has not met the requirements for the degree examined but may resubmit, on one occasion only, a revised thesis for re-examination within 12 months. The examiners must provide a separate statement describing the shortcomings of the thesis and the changes required. These may include, amongst other things, editorial corrections and revisions, rewriting a part, parts or the whole of the thesis, the carrying out of further research and/or experimental work. They must also specify the referral period, which should not normally be less than six months or exceed 12 months.

For viva outcomes (f) to (j) (below) the candidate is awarded a degree at a lower level from the qualification for which they were initially assessed (for example awarding an MPhil to a PhD candidate). In such cases, the examiners must clearly provide in their statement how the candidate has met the criteria for the lower award in addition to the reasons for not meeting the criteria for the higher award.

- (f) **Award of a (lower award) subject to no corrections.**
- (g) **Award of a (lower award) subject to minor typographical/presentational corrections.** The candidate makes any corrections prior to submission of the final version of the thesis.
- (h) **Award of a (lower award) subject to minor corrections to be made within three months.** The candidate has not met the requirements for the degree examined but has met the requirements for the (lower award) subject to the approval of minor corrections. The examiners must provide a list of the corrections that they wish to see made. Minor corrections should not require the candidate to conduct further research or undertake substantial further work. These include typographical errors, clarifying points, rephrasing, editing/adding paragraphs, correcting references, etc. The internal examiner must confirm in writing these have been made satisfactorily. Corrections must be made and the thesis submitted within three months.
- (i) **Award of a (lower award) subject to major corrections to be made within six months.** The candidate has not met the requirements for the degree examined but has met the requirements for the (lower award) subject to the approval of major corrections. The examiners must provide a list of the corrections that they wish to see made. Major corrections require the candidate to undertake substantial further work but the corrected thesis should not require re-examination. Such major corrections include more extensive editorial revisions, the addition of substantial new material, re-writing of substantial parts

of the thesis, re-analysis of existing data, etc. and the internal examiner must confirm in writing that these have been made satisfactorily. Revisions must be made and thesis submitted within six months.

- (j) **Referral for a (lower award).** The candidate has not met the requirements for the degree examined but may resubmit a revised thesis for re-examination for a (lower award). The examiners must provide a statement describing the shortcomings of the thesis and the changes required. These may include, amongst other things, editorial corrections and revisions, rewriting a part, parts or the whole of the thesis, the carrying out of further research and/or experimental work. They must also specify the referral period, which should not normally be less than six months or exceed 12 months.
- (k) **Fail.** The examiners must provide a clear statement describing the shortcomings of the thesis.

Summary of outcomes available for each type of research degree:

	PhD	MPhil	MAD/MSD	Professional Doctorate
a) Pass subject to no corrections	✓	✓	✓	✓
b) Pass subject to minor typographical/presentational corrections.	✓	✓	✓	✓
c) Pass subject to minor corrections to be made within three months	✓	✓	✓	✓
d) Pass subject to major corrections to be made within six months	✓	✓	✓	✓
e) Referral for re-examination in up to 12 months. ¹	✓	✓	✓	✓
f) Award of a (lower award) subject to no corrections.	✓ (MPhil)	✓ (MAD/MSD)	✗	✓ (MAD/MSD)
g) Award of a (lower award) subject to minor typographical/presentational corrections.	✓ (MPhil)	✓ (MAD/MSD)	✗	✓ (MAD/MSD)
h) Award of a (lower award) subject to minor corrections to be made within three months.	✓ (MPhil)	✓ (MAD/MSD)	✗	✓ (MAD/MSD)
i) Award of a (lower award) subject to major corrections to be made within six months.	✓ (MPhil)	✓ (MAD/MSD)	✗	✓ (MAD/MSD)
j) Referral for a (lower award). ²	✓ (MPhil)	✓ (MAD/MSD)	✗	✓ (MAD/MSD)
k) Fail.	✓	✓	✓	✓

Return of joint report form

At the end of the viva the Joint Report (RD4) form must be completed and signed by both examiners and returned immediately to the Postgraduate Research Education Team as an email attachment to pgresearch@essex.ac.uk.

In the case of a 'referral', 'pass subject to minor corrections' or 'pass subject to major corrections', a typed list of such corrections **MUST** be returned with the Joint Report (RD4) form.

¹ First examinations only; not available as a research examination outcome.

² As above.

In addition, it's advisable for notes to also be added to the electronic version of this thesis and sent to the student, to aid them whilst undertaking the correction/referral process.

The RD4 form and the examination outcome recommended by the examiners will have to be approved by the Dean. The Dean may require additional information when considering the recommendations. Examiners should respond to such requests accordingly. The candidate will be formally informed of the result of the examination by the Postgraduate Research Education Team, once it has been approved by the Dean.

When completing your reports, please bear in mind that it is University policy that research degree candidates are entitled to receive copies of the examiners' pre- and post -viva reports on their thesis, upon request.

Financial forms

The external examiner is responsible for returning all completed financial forms to the PGRE Team after the viva, for payment to be approved.

Travel and subsistence claims for vivas held in-person

Apart from exceptional circumstances, only expenditure on second-class rail, bus or coach fares will be reimbursed. Costs for any other form of transport (such as airfare or taxi) must be approved by the PGRE Team in advance of the viva.

Car mileage may only be claimed where public transport was not available, where it is the cheaper mode of transport, or in other exceptional circumstances. **Please refer to the second page of the 'Claim for reimbursement of travel/subsistence expenses' form** for more detailed information.

The PGRE Team will cover the costs of a meal for up to two people (normally the internal and external examiner) at a rate of £30 per person. In cases where an Independent Chair has been appointed, in addition to the two examiners, the costs of a meal for the Independent Chair will be covered additionally at the same rate.

In addition to the cost of a meal, the PGRE Team would normally cover the cost of a snack/drink up to the value of £10 for the external examiner; for example, refreshments at the train station during their travels.

Publication of Result

A candidate shall normally be informed of the result of the viva within one month from the date of the viva. Candidates are entitled to receive copies of the examiners' reports on their thesis on request, when examining is complete.

Conferment of the Degree

The Dean determines the conferment or otherwise of the degree.

Appeals and Complaints

A student or candidate has the right to appeal a viva outcome following the [Appeals Procedures](#). A student or candidate has the right to make a formal complaint following the [Student Concerns and Complaints Procedure](#).

Appendix 1

Please note: The following viva outcomes only apply to candidates who submitted their thesis before 03 October 2019.

Viva outcomes

Examiners may recommend one of the following viva outcomes on academic grounds: A, B, C, D, E, F, G or H.

Lower award: Master of Philosophy (MPhil)

The outcomes available for each degree, and any lower award, are specified in the programme requirements below. The outcomes are:

- A. Pass with *no corrections or minor typographical/presentational corrections*. The candidate makes any corrections prior to submission of the final version of the thesis.
- B. Pass with *minor corrections* to be made within three months. The examiners must provide a list of corrections that they wish to see made. Minor corrections should not require the candidate to conduct further research or undertake substantial further work. These include typographical errors, clarifying points, rephrasing, editing/adding paragraphs, correcting references, etc. The internal examiner must confirm in writing that these have been made satisfactorily. Corrections must be made and the thesis submitted within three months.
- C. Pass with *major corrections* to be made within six months. The examiners must provide a list of corrections that they wish to see made. Major corrections require the candidate to undertake substantial further work but the corrected thesis should not require re-examination. Such major corrections include more extensive editorial revisions, the addition of substantial new material, re-writing of substantial parts of the thesis, re-analysis of existing data, etc. The internal examiner must confirm in writing that these have been made satisfactorily. Corrections must be made and the thesis submitted within six months.
- D. Referral for re-examination in up to 12 months. The candidate has not met the requirements for the degree examined but may resubmit, on one occasion only, a revised thesis for re-examination within 12 months. The examiners must provide a statement describing the shortcomings of the thesis and the changes required. These may include, amongst other things, editorial corrections and revisions, rewriting a part, parts or the whole of the thesis, the carrying out of further research and/or experimental work. They must also specify the referral period, which should not normally be less than six months or exceed 12 months.

For viva outcomes E, F and G (below) the candidate is awarded a degree at a lower level from the qualification for which they were initially assessed (for example awarding a MPhil to a PhD candidate). In such cases, the examiners must clearly provide in their statement how the candidate has met the criteria for the lower award in addition to the reasons for not meeting the criteria for the higher award.

- E. Award of a (lower award) with *minor corrections* to be made within three months. The candidate has not met the requirements for the degree examined but has met the requirements for the (lower award) subject to the approval of *minor corrections*. The examiners must provide a list of the corrections that they wish to see made. Minor corrections should not require the candidate to conduct further research or undertake substantial further work. These include typographical errors, clarifying points, rephrasing, editing/adding paragraphs, correcting references, etc. The internal examiner must confirm in writing these have been made satisfactorily. Corrections must be made and the thesis submitted within three months.

- F. Award of a (lower award) with *major corrections* to be made within six months. The candidate has not met the requirements for the degree examined but has met the requirements for the (lower award) subject to the approval of *major corrections*. The examiners must provide a list of the corrections that they wish to see made. Major corrections require the candidate to undertake substantial further work but the corrected thesis should not require re-examination. Such major corrections include more extensive editorial revisions, the addition of substantial new material, re-writing of substantial parts of the thesis, re-analysis of existing data, etc. and the internal examiner must confirm in writing that these have been made satisfactorily. Revisions must be made and thesis submitted within six months.
- G. Referral for a (lower award). The candidate has not met the requirements for the degree examined but may resubmit a revised thesis for re-examination for a (lower award). The examiners must provide a statement describing the shortcomings of the thesis and the changes required. These may include, amongst other things, editorial corrections and revisions, rewriting a part, parts or the whole of the thesis, the carrying out of further research and/or experimental work. They must also specify the referral period, which should not normally be less than six months or exceed 12 months.
- H. Fail. The examiners must provide a clear statement describing the shortcomings of the thesis.