POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH EXAMINATION GUIDE
INTRODUCTION

This document is here to help you learn everything you need to know about the Postgraduate Research examination process at Essex. It will guide you through the format of your thesis, the submission process, the viva and possible examination outcomes, how to request an embargo (where relevant), and how to upload your thesis to the repository. This guide also offers practical recommendations to support you during the time between your thesis submission and your viva.

Within this guide you'll also find advice regarding how best to approach your viva, things to think about before the day, and how to prepare to get the best outcome.

RESOURCES

This guide has been developed using information located within various documents created by the University. The following resources are available to provide additional information:

- Principal Regulations for Research Degrees
- Code of Practice for Research Degrees
- Policy on thesis submission, deposit, and retention
- Repository Thesis Deposit Instructions
- Viva Guidelines
- Independent Chair Policy

Below is an outline of the process you’ll be required to undertake during the next few months. This guide will take you through each stage, so please keep referring back to it.
BEFORE YOU SUBMIT

Before you are due to submit your thesis for examination you must complete an ‘Approval of Research Degree Thesis Title’ form. This form starts the process of appointing your examiners and ensures the University is ready for your submission. To ensure your viva is arranged in good time, please submit the form 3 months ahead of when you’re due to submit your thesis (for example, if you’re due to submit your thesis on the 3rd October, you will be expected to complete your intention to submit form by the 3rd July). The form needs to be given to the Graduate Administrator within your department. The form will need to be signed by your Supervisor and Department, so please make sure you start the process early. We do accept this form via email, with electronic signatures as appropriate.

On the form you’ll be asked whether you’d like to restrict access to your thesis (including requesting an embargo) after it has been uploaded to the repository. Please see the ‘Restricting Access’ section of this guide for more information.

On the form you’ll be asked to include the title of your thesis. The title you write here must match the title on your submitted thesis. If the titles don’t match you may be asked to resubmit the intention to submit form, which could cause delays to your viva taking place. With this in mind, make sure you make a copy of the form before submitting it.
RESTRICTING ACCESS TO YOUR THESIS

Once you have successfully completed your research degree, you’ll be required to upload your thesis to the University of Essex Research Repository (more details later in this guide) and must do so prior to confirmation of the award of your degree.

Unless there are strong grounds, the University’s expectation is that uploads to the Repository are made Open Access as standard, and if you require any restriction to the access of your thesis, you must make the request when completing the ‘Approval of Research Degree Thesis Title’ form.

There are several advantages to making your thesis open access, including:

- It has the potential to enhance your reputation as a researcher by allowing you to disseminate your research as widely as possible with minimal effort. This could lead to your research contributing more visibly to related research on the topic, make it easier for other researchers to include your work in their literature reviews, and maybe even lead to enquiries from other researchers or institutions who would like to collaborate.
- It makes the University’s outputs more visible, thereby enhancing the reach of our excellent research internationally.
- It contributes to the open access agenda in which research papers and theses are being made available without barriers to the public, to small and medium enterprises and to other researchers across the globe.
The following concerns might lead you to requesting a restriction to the access of your thesis:

**Third-party copyright**
Under UK and most international copyright laws, any significant work automatically attracts copyright protection. This is designed to protect the rights of authors. Authors (or their publishers) can take legal action against those who infringe their copyright. Your thesis may contain material that you don’t hold the copyright for, for example: quotations lengthier than permitted for educational use, images, photographs, graphs, tables, maps, etc. If you have included such material from either a published or unpublished work you will need to have obtained the rights holders’ permission to include their content in the online version of your thesis. Third party copyright material can be included for examination purposes (for which the audience is limited to your supervisors, markers and external examiners), but not for open access without permission from the rights holders.

**Sensitive information other than personal data**
Your thesis may contain content-sensitive information that could mean open access to the full text of your thesis is not feasible. For example, if your thesis includes any potentially sensitive commercial information, any information provided in confidence or information relating to security matters, access to the full text of your thesis should be permanently restricted in the research repository.

**The requirements of any funding you have received**
If your degree was funded by a Research Council you should check if your funder requires a particular deposit option, as some research councils require an open access deposit. If you have been funded by a commercial or other private funder you should make sure that you comply with their requirements regarding access to the completed thesis.

**Possible future publication of your research**
Access to the full text of a thesis in the research repository can be restricted if you are concerned that including the text may prevent you from finding a publisher for your thesis. You should discuss these concerns with your supervisor before concluding that restricted access is necessary.

**Personal data**
If your thesis contains personal data relating to individuals who haven’t given consent for their data to be made available online, access to the full text of your thesis should be permanently restricted in the research repository.
If you do decide you need a restriction to the access of your thesis, please review the below restriction tiers available. You should limit the restriction as much as possible. Once you’ve considered the following options, you’ll need to indicate your decision on your approval of title form.

**Open access**
The thesis is fully available for access. It is expected that the majority of thesis submissions would fall into this category.

**Redacted**
Certain sections of the thesis are redacted to prevent others from viewing them (usually due to data protection or copyright issues).

**Embargoed for a limited period (either 3 or 5 years):**
The thesis is not available for the set amount of time, after which it will revert to open access. The metadata (title, abstract) will be available throughout this period.

**Controlled**
The thesis is permanently not available; however, the metadata is available. This option is granted in exceptional circumstances.

**Restricted**
Both the thesis and metadata are not available permanently. This option is granted in very rare and exceptional circumstances.

If your rationale for requiring an embargo is of a sensitive nature, and you do not want to share it with your department, preferring instead to explain the reasoning in person with the Deputy Dean (PGRE), please email pgresearch@essex.ac.uk to arrange this.
THESIS FORMAT

Three months ago you considered whether you required a restriction to the access of your thesis, and you submitted your ‘Approval of Research Degree Thesis Title’ form. You’ve now finished writing up your thesis and it’s time to press print. We require your thesis to be presented and formatted in a certain way, so it’s important you read through the requirements below, before submitting your thesis. Additional information can be found here.

Paper
Use standard A4, good quality, white paper. Candidates are asked to check each page to ensure that the print is clear.

Page Layout
- Candidates may print on both sides of the paper (double-sided printing)
- Double line spacing should be used for everything except quotations, footnotes, captions to plates etc.
- Where double-sided printing is used, both the left hand and right hand margins must be at least 3.2cm (this is the binding margin).
- Where single-sided printing is used, only the left hand margin must be at least 3.2cm (this is the binding margin). It is desirable to leave about 1.3cm at the outer edge of the page.
- It is desirable to leave 2.5cm margins at the top and bottom of the page.
- The best position for the page number is at the top right corner.

Plate captions, full page photographs and graphs
If you thesis contains any plates, full page photographs or page size graphs (that is, separate pages with visuals), please arrange them as follows:
- Plate/graph upright - Caption at bottom, plate number immediately above.
- Plate/graph sideways - Caption at right-hand side with plate number above it.

If the plate is to face the text, binding margin must be at the right-hand edge but if the plate is to face blank verso of previous page then the binding margin must be at the left.

Large maps and diagrams that exceed page size may not be suitable for printing out or binding. Please provide them in a separate portfolio for examination purposes.

For further advice, please consult your supervisor.

Word counts
The following word counts are the maximum permitted for each level of award*:

- PhD** 80000
- Professional Doctorate 40000
- MD 65000
- MPhil 50000
- MA/MSC by Dissertation 30000

For degrees which involve Practice as Research (PaR), no less than 50% of the research output should be the written thesis. The written thesis for PaR degrees may be comprised of a range of written elements including, but not limited to, a critical review, a portfolio, and/or a statement on theoretical discourse or methodology.

*In all cases including quotations but excluding appendices table of contents/figures, abstract, references, acknowledgements, bibliography and footnotes (as long as the latter do not contain substantive argument). Please note these are word limits not targets.

**In cases of practice based PhD’s or MPhil’s these suggested word counts may be different. It is normally expected that the written component would comprise no less than 50% of the overall output.

Each copy of the thesis should contain a summary or abstract not exceeding 300 words.
Title page
Below is an example of how the layout of your title page should be

A time-series analysis of Shakespeare’s metrical psalms

A N. Other

A thesis submitted for the degree of ..........

Department/School of .................

University of Essex

Date of submission for examination (month and year)
Or Date of resubmission for examination (if applicable)
THESIS SUBMISSION

Congratulations! You’ve finished writing up your thesis, you’ve checked the formatting, pressed print and you’re ready to submit.

If you have any outstanding registration fees or debts, they must be paid before the thesis can be accepted for submission.

All candidates for Masters by Dissertation (MA or MSc), Master of Philosophy (MPhil), Doctor of Medicine (MD), Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and Professional Doctorate must submit two copies of their thesis for examination. Candidates being examined as staff must also submit an electronic version of their thesis.

The copies of your theses should be submitted for examination in an unbound format, however, they must be adequately secured (for example in spring-back binders or comb binding and not in ring binders or lever arch box files). The binding must not be overfilled, so if required please split your thesis into two parts to avoid any risk of the binding becoming open.

Please note that you must provide an electronic copy of your submitted thesis to the Postgraduate Research Education Team if your examiner requests an electronic version. It’s really important that this is identical to the hard copy version you submitted.

You should submit to the Silberrad Student Centre:

- Your two copies of the thesis or dissertation.
- A ‘Submission Form for a thesis to be Presented for a Research Degree’ (RD1) form completed and signed by yourself (you’ll be emailed this form after you submit the ‘Approval of Research Degree Thesis Title’ form. This form should be produced as a separate piece of paper to your thesis, not attached to the top of it).

You are strongly advised to retain a copy of the thesis or dissertation for yourself.

All theses should be submitted to:

Student Information Desk
Silberrad Centre
University of Essex
Wivenhoe Park
Colchester
Essex CO4 3SQ

All submitted copies of the thesis belong to the University during the examination process and shall be returned to the candidate following the viva.
WHAT TO DO BEFORE THE VIVA?

Don’t underestimate the accomplishment!
Your focus for the past few years has been on undertaking your research and writing your thesis. Now that it’s been submitted, take some time to congratulate yourself!

You may want to reflect on what it has taken to get to this point; you may not have maintained contact with family and friends during the final weeks, your hobbies and interests may have taken a back seat, you may not have been eating and sleeping as well as you could… So step back and take time for yourself; it’s a massive achievement, so relax (a bit!)

Ok, now you’ve had time to relax and regather your thoughts, it’s time to start preparing for your viva.

Research your examiners
Once you know the names of the examiners, it’s a good idea to establish how their research links with yours. Try and read some of their published work and consider how they may approach the findings of your research.

Re-read your thesis
Now you’ve had an opportunity to reflect, it’s a good idea to re-read your thesis ahead of the viva. If you find mistakes please don’t worry, these can be corrected following the viva, during the corrections stage. But please do make a note of them, in case they are discussed during the viva.

Write an overview of your thesis
Make notes about each chapter and summarise the details within each section. Don’t worry, there isn’t an expectation that you’ll have memorised your thesis, but the notes will be a useful reference point. You can take your thesis and notes into the viva with you, and we recommend putting page markers into sections you feel you may need to refer to/quote from.
Have a “practice viva”
To help you prepare for answering questions, we recommend taking part in a practice viva. This can take different forms, from meeting with your supervisor or a peer, through to practicing questions on your own, or taking a mock viva as part of our ‘Surviving the Viva’ workshop.

It’s expected that your supervisor will support you in the preparation for your viva. However, there’s a lot of support available to you from outside your department as well. Proficio runs a ‘Surviving the Viva’ course, which provides students with hints and tips, as well as a platform to ask questions. The course sets out to demystify the viva process, explains what the examiners expect from the student and provides practical advice on how to prepare for the viva.

Organisational Development also runs ‘Coaching for Success’, a one-to-one coaching provision that may boost your confidence and help you understand how you can perform best in exciting but challenging situations. To book a coaching session visit Proficio and book a place.

Final preparations
In the days leading up to the viva, we recommend getting prepared and thinking things through. Some of the suggestions below are quite small, but not having to think about them on the morning of the viva should help to focus on the important elements and remain relaxed.

Think about the transport you’ll take, to ensure you’ll arrive in plenty of time. Plan what you’re going to wear; you need to look smart, whilst also being comfortable and confident in your appearance.

Plan what you’ll take into the room with you, and be organised with your items; you don’t want to be hunting in the bottom of a bag for something that you can’t find.

Look at the venue and the timings of the viva. If possible visit the room where the viva will be held. Consider when will be the best time to eat.

Don’t forget to take care of your wellbeing in the weeks leading up to the viva, engage with the PGRE-led wellbeing events. Plan a calming activity to help you on the morning. Some calming mindfulness tips can be found here.
THE 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/dissertation. However, the viva, which is the oral part of the assessment, is used to inform the examiners’ final assessment decision. The viva gives the examiners the opportunity to explore any issues in detail and provide inspiring advice for your future research career. Examiners may have a strong sense of the outcome from reading the thesis, but the viva gives you an opportunity to defend your work, as well as to validate the thesis and demonstrate your skills in participating in academic discussion with research colleagues.

Viva arrangements
Your Department is responsible for nominating two examiners: one internal and one external, whose names must be approved by the Deputy Dean (Postgraduate Research Education). The internal examiner is expected to undertake any arrangements necessary for conducting the viva. You’ll then be contacted to confirm the arrangements for the examination of the thesis, including the date and time of the viva. The viva should be held no later than two months after the submission of the thesis for examination unless exceptional circumstances prevent it from happening. In the case of a staff candidate, the department must nominate two external examiners, rather than an internal and an external, and an Independent Chair is appointed to oversee the examination process.

Students who fail to engage in viva arrangements, to the extent where it has not been possible to conduct a viva, shall be deemed to have withdrawn permanently from the University.

Venue
The venue for the viva should normally be on a University of Essex campus, reasonably quiet and allow the viva to proceed without interruption. The Deputy Dean’s (Postgraduate Research Education) approval is required for a viva to be held at a venue outside the University of Essex.

The Deputy Dean’s (Postgraduate Research Education) permission is also required for approval of the use of a video link, or similar. More information regarding the use of a video link at a viva can be found here: https://www.essex.ac.uk/-/media/documents/about/governance/code-practice-vivas-via-video.pdf

Who attends?
The viva will normally only involve the internal examiner, the external examiner and the student. The Deputy Dean (Postgraduate Research Education) may appoint an Independent Chair, who is a senior member of the Academic or Research staff of the University of Essex, to oversee the conduct of the oral examination in line with the Policy for the Appointment of Independent Chairs for Research Degree Vivas.

The student’s supervisor can only be present in exceptional circumstances, approved on an individual basis by the Deputy Dean (Postgraduate Research Education) and with the agreement of the external examiner.
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. If you feel the need for a break earlier than 2 hours, please feel free to inform the examiners. Any breaks taken will not affect the outcome of the viva.

Discussion between examiners
Once you’ve submitted your thesis and the examiners have been appointed, copies of the thesis/dissertation and examination paperwork are sent to the examiners by the Postgraduate Research Education Team.

The examiners must not contact each other to discuss their assessment of your thesis, nor engage in discussion with you ahead of the viva, except for when making logistical arrangements. On the day of the viva and before seeing the student, the examiners will have a pre-viva meeting at which they discuss their initial assessment and agree the approach to the viva, including the areas of questioning.

It is the responsibility of the internal examiner to oversee the proceedings at the viva and to ensure that the University’s Principal Regulations for Research Degrees are adhered to, unless an Independent Chair has been appointed.

The start of the viva
At the start of the viva, the internal examiner will introduce the examination team, confirm the purpose of the viva, and explain how the viva will proceed. If there is anything you’re unsure of, now is a good time to ask.

Questioning
Remember, no one is perfect. There will be strengths and weaknesses to your research and your examiners will want to explore these in more detail. Normally, the examiners will start with some general/introductory questions that will ease you into discussing your thesis and research. These will be followed by a discussion of strengths and weaknesses of the thesis. It will be an opportunity for you to demonstrate your abilities of self-analysis and reflection, exploring things you’d do differently in future and what you’ve learnt during the process.

The examiners will be asking questions to provide clarification, and seek explanation and elaboration where appropriate. Please remember that each examiner has a different style, and some questions may appear quite direct and challenging. In this situation, it’s important to stay relaxed and take your time to give a thoughtful response.

If you are asked a question which you don’t understand, feel free to ask for clarification.

Reaching a decision
Once the viva has finished, you’ll be asked to leave the room, whilst the examiners reach a conclusion about the recommended result. The result will be one which is listed in the University’s Principal Regulations for Research Degrees. You’ll then be invited back into the room to be told the recommended result and the reasons for the decision. If corrections are required, you’ll be sent a written list of corrections after the viva. Your examiners may give you back your thesis at the end of the viva, or alternatively they may use it whilst developing your list of corrections, and then request that the PGRE team return the thesis to you.
AFTER YOUR VIVA

What happens next will depend on the outcome of your viva. We have included the possible outcomes below, as well as advice about what you should do next.

**Pass**
All you need to do is to upload your thesis to the Repository. Details of how to do this can be found on the next page.

**Pass Subject to typographical corrections**
Normally you'll be informed about these corrections at the viva, or they'll be marked in the copy of the thesis that the examiners will return to you. You need to complete these corrections and then upload your thesis to the Research Repository; details of how to do this can be found on the next page.

**Pass subject to three months corrections**
You will be asked to implement minor corrections within 3 months, which should not require you to conduct further research or undertake substantial further work. These can include typographical errors, clarifying points, rephrasing, editing/adding paragraphs, correcting references, etc.

Shortly after the viva, the PGRE team will send you the list of these corrections, which your examiners will have created. Take some time to fully read the corrections and then discuss them with your supervisor. If there are any corrections which you don’t understand or which require further clarification, please contact your internal examiner. Remember your internal examiner and your supervisor are available during your corrections period to support you if you require it.

Once your corrections have been completed, you'll need to send the updated version of your thesis to your internal examiner via email, and cc in pgresearch@essex.ac.uk. Your examiner may ask you to send the corrections in a specific format, so please liaise with them for clarification on their individual requirements.

**Pass subject to six months corrections**
This outcome requires you to amend your thesis within 6 months. This requires you to undertake substantial further work but the corrected thesis does not require full re-examination. Such major corrections include more extensive editorial revisions, the addition of substantial new material, rewriting of substantial parts of the thesis, re-analysis of existing data, etc.

Shortly after the viva, the PGRE team will send you the list of these corrections, which your examiners will have created. Take some time to fully read the corrections and then discuss them with your supervisor. If there are any corrections which require further clarification, please contact your internal examiner. Remember your internal examiner and your supervisor are available during your corrections period to support you if you require it.

Once your corrections have been approved by your examiner, the PGRE Team will seek formal approval by the relevant Deputy Dean and subsequently notify you that you can upload the new thesis to the Repository, details of which can be found in the next section.
Referral
This outcome means that, at present, you have not met the requirements for the award, and you've been permitted to undertake further substantive work on your thesis for submission for re-examination within the next 12 months.

The examiners will 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 and/or conducting further research or experimental work.

During this period it's really important that you work closely with your supervisor to undertake the work requested by the examiners and that you liaise with the internal examiner if anything is unclear. Whilst in your referral period, you'll be registered as a student and required to pay the relevant tuition fee, details of which can be found on the Funding pages.

At the end of your referral period, you must resubmit your amended thesis to the Silberrad Student Centre and the viva process will commence again.

A lower award
If you do not meet the requirements of the degree for which you're being examined, you may be awarded a lower award or be asked to make further corrections in order to be awarded a lower award. Further details regarding this can be found in the Principal Regulations for Research Degrees, section 4.33.

Fail
In very rare circumstances, examiners may deem that the thesis hasn't met the requirements for the various examination outcomes outlined previously, and so recommend the outcome is 'fail'. In this instance, the examiners will provide a clear statement describing the reasons for the failure of your thesis.
HOW TO UPLOAD YOUR THESIS TO THE REPOSITORY

Once you have successfully completed your research degree at the University of Essex you should submit an electronic copy of your thesis to the University of Essex Research Repository. This must be done in order for you to be awarded your degree. Here’s a guide to using the Repository for the first time, and for uploading the thesis. Please note that all mandatory fields are marked with a 📘

Step 1
Login with your University ID & password at: https://repository.essex.ac.uk/cgi/users/login

Step 2
Click ‘New Item’ button

Step 3
Upload a copy of your thesis in PDF format by clicking on Choose File, navigate to the location of the paper select it and click ‘OK’

Step 4
If your thesis is to be made open access immediately click ‘Next’ to move to the next screen and step 6 in this guide.

If you have had an embargo period approved, you need to indicate here the length of time which was agreed.

Click ‘Show Options’ to set the embargo end date.

Set ‘Visible to Repository staff only’ and enter the year, month and day under ‘Embargo expiry date’.

The embargo is automatically lifted by the repository software on the expiry date. The embargo period set will be confirmed by repository staff as part of the process of checking the thesis repository record after deposit.

Click ‘Next’ to move to the next screen

Step 5
The details screen allows you to input the details of your thesis – title, abstract, author etc. As a minimum you will need to complete the mandatory fields –

- **Title** – Full title, including any subtitle. Separate title from subtitle(s) using space colon space ( : ). Use sentence case.
- **Creators** - The author of the work as presented on the title page.
- **Thesis Type** – Select the appropriate radio button e.g. PhD. For Professional Doctorates use Other.
- **Supervisor(s)** - Thesis supervisor(s)
- **Publication Details:**
  - **Status** – Use the default entry – Unpublished.
  - **Date** – Month and Year you were informed you’d passed your viva and needed to upload your thesis to the Repository
  - **Date Type** – Completion
  - **Institution** - University of Essex

Step 6
This step allows you to enter additional information such as an Abstract and details of funding bodies or sponsors eg.

- **Abstract** - Brief summary of the thesis (up to 300 words, mandatory)
- **Divisions** – choose the name of the University School, Department or Institute that you were a member of whilst undertaking your research. If your departmental name isn’t appealing in the list, you can add it to the Department free text box
- **Grant number** - Grant number allocated by funding body if appropriate.
- **Funders** - Name of any institution(s) funding the research, in whole or in part. Additional funders (if any) can be added by clicking the **More input rows** button.
- **Contact email address** - When the full-text is not made available (under embargo), requests by external users to view the full-text will be sent to this email address. A personal email address should be used in this field as university email accounts will be deleted once a student has completed their study. The email address supplied will not be made public.
- **Uncontrolled Keywords** - Subject keywords to aid retrieval.

Click ‘**Next**’ to move to the next screen

**Step 7**
Under ‘Subjects’ you may add at least one subject heading from the Library of Congress Classification. The subject list is available here - [http://repository.essex.ac.uk/view/subjects/](http://repository.essex.ac.uk/view/subjects/)

Click ‘**Next**’ or ‘**Deposit**’

**Step 8**
If you have finished, click ‘**Deposit item now**’. If you wish to come back and re-edit the repository record click ‘**Save for later**’

Once you have clicked ‘**Deposit item now**’ you will no longer be able to amend the repository record, it will have been sent to the Review area for checking. Once an item has been deposited in the Repository it will not be visible straight away as it has to be approved by Repository staff before it goes to the live system.

You will receive an email to confirm the deposit when your thesis has been made available online.

Any questions, please email repository@essex.ac.uk

Once your deposit has been accepted to the repository, the PGRE Team will seek approval to confer your degree from the Deputy Dean, confirmation of which will be emailed to you within 14 days of your successful upload to the Repository.