

# The Research Degree Examination

## (1) Appointment of Examiners

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Research degree examiners must be approved by the Research Degrees Committee, 4 - 6 months before the candidate expects to submit their thesis. Under no circumstances should candidates be asked to identify or contact prospective examiners.

- a) Examiners for MPhil, PhD and DProf degree candidates are approved by the Research Degrees Committee (RDC). The RDC meets four times a year before Academic Board. It is the responsibility of the supervisor to ensure that examiners are approved. It is strongly recommended that nominations are submitted to the meeting occurring no later than 4 months before submission of the thesis.
- b) Supervisors must complete a standard form. Forms are found on the Graduate School site on RVC Learn. They must be submitted to the secretary of the RDC (currently Lisa Matamala-Shaw, Graduate School, Camden; [lshaw@rvc.ac.uk](mailto:lshaw@rvc.ac.uk)) no later than 8 working days before the Committee meets. Notice of meetings is posted on the Intranet.
- c) A draft abstract of the thesis must be attached to the form. (This is solely for assessing the suitability of the examiners and need not be the final document.)
- d) Two examiners must be nominated of whom one is an internal examiner (i.e. from within the University of London and normally from a school/College of the University other than the RVC) and the other an external examiner (from outside the University of London). At least one examiner must have experience of examining University of London PhDs or DProfs (if it is a DProf candidate). If there is no-one in any of the other schools/Colleges of the University of London who would be able to examine the thesis, two external examiners or an examiner from the RVC may be nominated to serve. In some circumstances it may be necessary to appoint 3 examiners to ensure that all aspects of the thesis are comprehensively examined. An examiner should have no association with the submitted work and in no circumstances would be the supervisor. It is recognised that, occasionally, an internal and external examiner will, between them, be able to cover all aspects of the work presented by the candidate but lack previous experience of examining University of London research degrees. In these circumstances, an Independent Chairman who has experience of examining for the University of London could be appointed.
- e) Supervisors may be asked to attend the RDC meeting when examiners are being appointed for their candidate.
- f) The RVC Research Degrees Officer will email the candidate, supervisor and all examiners to confirm the appointments.

## (2) Thesis requirements

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### (a) Length

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

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

The length of an RVC DProf thesis should be no more than 30,000 words (excluding title, figures, tables, appendices and references). Theses which are largely social science based may, with prior agreement, be no more than 45,000 words.

Appendices should only include material which the examiners are not required to read in order to examine the thesis (but to which they may refer if they wish).

These are upper limits and not targets. Candidates should consult with their supervisor(s) about the length of thesis that is appropriate for each particular research topic and be mindful that brevity without sacrifice of clarity will be appreciated by examiners.

**Except as stated above for some DProf thesis, extensions to the word limit will not be permitted.**

## **(b) Content and Structure**

### **(i) PhD thesis**

The scope of the thesis should be what might reasonably be expected after 3, or at most 4 years of full-time study. It must:

- Be written in English to a satisfactory literary standard and bound in accordance with RVC regulations
- Consist of the candidate's own account of their investigations, the greater proportion of which shall have been undertaken during the period of registration under supervision for the degree.

[The part played by the candidate in any work done jointly with the supervisor(s) and/or fellow researcher workers must be clearly stated by the candidate and certified by the supervisor]

- Form a distinct contribution to knowledge in the field and afford evidence of originality shown by the discovery of new facts and/or the exercise of independent critical power.
- Indicate in what respect the described studies have advanced the subject.
- **Not** contain work already submitted for another degree but **may** contain data obtained in conjunction with a Supervisor or fellow researchers, provided that the candidate clearly states their personal role in the investigation and the statement is testified by the Supervisor.

[Work already published, including work published in joint names, may be included *only if it is adapted to form an integral* part of the thesis and thereby makes a relevant contribution to the main theme of the thesis. A series of publications alone is not acceptable as a thesis. Publications may be bound at the back of the thesis as supplementary material].

- Give a critical assessment of the literature, describe the method of research and its findings, include discussion of those findings and indicate in what respects they appear to the candidate to advance the study of the subject. *In so doing the candidate will demonstrate a deep and synoptic understanding of their field of study by placing their work in a wider context, objectivity and the capacity for judgement of complex situations.*
- Demonstrate research skills relevant to the work presented.
- **Not** exceed the prescribed word limit (See thesis length).
- Include a full bibliography and references.

- Be of a standard to merit publication in whole or in part or in a revised form (for example as a monograph or a number of articles in peer-reviewed journals).

## **(ii) MPhil Thesis**

The scope of an MPhil thesis should be what might reasonably be expected after 2 or at most 3 years of full time study. It must:

- Be written in English to a satisfactory literary standard and bound in accordance with RVC regulations
- Consist of the candidate's own account of their investigations, the greater proportion of which shall have been undertaken during the period of registration under supervision for the degree.

[The part played by the candidate in any work done jointly with the supervisor(s) and/or fellow researcher workers must be clearly stated by the candidate and certified by the supervisor]

- Be either a record of original work or of an ordered and critical exposition of existing knowledge and shall provide evidence that the field of study has been surveyed thoroughly.
- **Not** contain work already submitted for another degree but **may** contain data obtained in conjunction with a Supervisor or fellow researchers, provided that the candidate clearly states their personal role in the investigation and the statement is testified by the Supervisor.

[Work already published, including work published in joint names, may be included *only if it forms an integral* part of the thesis and thereby makes a relevant contribution to the main theme of the thesis. A series of publications alone is not acceptable as a thesis. Publications may be bound at the back of the thesis as supplementary material.]

- Be an integrated whole and present a coherent argument.
- Give a critical assessment of the relevant literature, describe the method of research and its findings and include a discussion on those findings.
- **Not** exceed the prescribed word limit (See thesis length).
- Include a full bibliography and references.

## **(iii) DProf Thesis**

The DProf thesis is expected to comprise a series of 4-5 separate studies connected by a common theme, which should be presented as a series of study chapters preceded by an overall introduction and ending with a general discussion. The content should fulfil the criteria listed under (i) PhD Thesis.

## **(3) Submission Process**

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When the thesis is complete, it should be bound as per RVC specifications (see the Instructions on Submission, Format and Binding document). \*Two copies must be taken to the Graduate School between 09.00 and 17.00 Monday to Friday. An additional copy should be taken to the oral exam. This may be a soft or hard bound copy. \*Unless 3 examiners have been appointed.

A PDF copy of the thesis should either be given, or sent by e-mail, to the Research Degrees Officer (currently Lisa Matamala-Shaw [lshaw@rvc.ac.uk](mailto:lshaw@rvc.ac.uk)) at the time of submission or just before. This will be run through Turnitin (plagiarism software).

Whenever possible, candidates should take their thesis to the Graduate School in person. Along with their thesis, they must submit the Consent to Publish and Declaration of Word forms. These are available on the Graduate School site on RVC Learn.

The Research Degrees Officer will send the thesis to the examiners and will work with the supervisor to arrange a date for the viva (oral examination) with the examiners. The supervisor/Research Degrees Officer are responsible for arranging the room booking, notifying any others concerned, and ordering appropriate refreshments.

#### **(4) Examination of the Thesis**

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The thesis is read and evaluated by the examiners and candidates will be asked to attend an oral examination (viva). This is normally held within 3 months of submission of the thesis.

##### **(a) The Oral Examination**

All candidates are required to attend the oral examination (viva) at the RVC (Camden or Hawkshead campus). It is therefore advisable that they remain in the country between submission of the thesis and the viva.

Any disabled candidates who are unable to undertake the usual viva must have discussed appropriate alternative arrangements with their supervisor, the Advice Centre Manager and/or medical advisors if appropriate. **They must send notification, in writing, of the recommended adjustments to the Graduate School at or before thesis submission.**

Supervisors are expected to arrange a 'mock' oral examination with the candidate to prepare them for what to expect.

Candidates are required to take an exact copy of the thesis to the viva... A supervisor may attend the viva with permission from the candidate and examiners, but must not participate unless directly requested by the examiners.

Normally there will be 2 examiners, one from the University of London (who *may* be from RVC) and one external to the University, although occasionally both examiners may be external to the University of London. In some circumstances it may be necessary to appoint 3 examiners to ensure that all aspects of the thesis are comprehensively examined. In other circumstances, such as when the examining team has had limited experience of examining University of London PhDs, or on re-examination of a thesis, an Independent Chairman (from the RVC) will also be present. They will not have read the thesis and will not play an active part in the examination. They are present to oversee the examination process.

At the oral examination, the examiners will be establishing that the work is the candidate's own and that they understand the work they have done. Candidates will be expected to defend their approach and interpretations, have a good general knowledge of the subject and be familiar with any relevant material published since submitting the thesis. They should be prepared to answer both very detailed questions about their work and those on the broader context of their studies.

To determine the result of a PhD examination, examiners can recommend that:

**1. The Candidate be awarded the degree of PhD**

- a. The candidate be **awarded** the degree of Doctor of Philosophy without further work.
- b. The candidate be awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy **subject to minor amendments** to the text made **within 3 months** and to the satisfaction of the internal examiner.

**2. The Candidate be permitted to re-submit for the degree of PhD**

- a. The candidate must make **major amendments** to the satisfaction of the examiners and **re-submit** the revised thesis **within 6 months** *without* a further oral examination.
- b. The candidate has **failed to satisfy the examiners at the oral examination** but will be permitted to **revise and re-submit** the thesis **within 18 months** *without* a further oral examination.
- c. The candidate has **failed to satisfy the examiners in the oral examination** but will be permitted to **re-present** the **same** thesis **within 6 months** *with* a further oral examination.
- d. The candidate has **failed to satisfy the examiners at the oral examination** but will be permitted to **revise and re-submit** the thesis **within 18 months** *with* a further oral examination.

**3. The Candidate be awarded/permitted to re-submit for the award of MPhil**

The candidate has failed to satisfy the examiners at the oral examination and will be invited to be considered for the award of MPhil.

**4. The Candidate be adjudged to have failed to satisfy the examiners for award of either MPhil or PhD**

The candidate will not be permitted to re-submit for an MPhil or PhD.

To determine the result of a DProf examination, examiners can recommend that:

**1. The Candidate be awarded the degree of \*VetD/DAGriFood**

- a. The candidate be **awarded** the degree of \*VetD/DAGriFood without further work.
- b. The candidate be awarded the degree of \*VetD/DAGriFood **subject to minor amendments** to the text made **within 3 months** and to the satisfaction of the internal examiner.

**2. The Candidate be permitted to re-submit for the degree of \*VetD/DAGriFood**

- a. The candidate must make **major amendments** to the satisfaction of the examiners and **re-submit** the revised thesis **within 6 months** *without* a further oral examination.

- b. The candidate has **failed to satisfy the examiners at the oral examination** but will be permitted to **revise and re-submit** the thesis **within 18 months** *without* a further oral examination.
- c. The candidate has **failed to satisfy the examiners in the oral examination** but will be permitted to **re-present** the **same** thesis **within 6 months** *with* a further oral examination.
- d. The candidate has **failed to satisfy the examiners at the oral examination** but will be permitted to **revise and re-submit** the thesis **within 18 months** *with* a further oral examination.

**3. The Candidate be awarded/permitted to re-submit for the award of \*Masters / Diploma in Professional Practice**

The candidate has failed to satisfy the examiners at the oral examination and will be invited to be considered for the award of \*Masters / Diploma in Professional Practice.

**4. The Candidate be adjudged to have failed to satisfy the examiners for award of either \*Masters/Diploma in Professional Practice or \*VetD/DAGriFood**

The candidate will not be permitted to re-submit for an Masters/Diploma or \*VetD/DAGriFood

Candidates are normally told the examiners' recommendation immediately after the oral examination. They will be officially informed of the result by the Graduate School and will receive a copy of the examiners' joint report and a list of any required changes. Candidates and their supervisors are reminded that the Graduate School will not send official notification of a result to the University of London until a hard copy of the final thesis (including any revisions required, and subsequently approved, by the examiners) has been received, and any outstanding fees or monies owed by the candidate to the College have been paid. The degree certificate will be sent by the University 2-3 months after this. If, for a specific purpose, earlier certification is required, the Graduate School can provide a provisional statement.

**Candidates are also reminded that they must not contact, petition or lobby the examiners before, during or after the oral examination, whatever the outcome.** In the circumstance of a candidate not reaching the required standard, the Research Degrees Officer or Head of the Graduate School will inform them about the options available. The candidate and their supervisor should then discuss the way forward.

**Thesis Revisions**

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The candidate may be required to make revisions to the thesis, as specified in the examiners' joint report. Depending on the nature and extent of the revisions required, they may be given 3 months (minor revisions), 6 or 18 months (major revisions) to complete the changes and re-submit the thesis. Candidates and their supervisors should be aware when planning dates and/or travel for the oral examination (viva) and other commitments that further work may be required after the viva and before the award of the degree. It is important that candidates allow sufficient time to make the required revisions. Supervisors will continue to provide advice throughout the process of revising the thesis.

## **Submission of Thesis Amendments**

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In the event that a candidate thinks it unlikely s/he will meet the 3, 6 or 18 month deadline, they should contact the Graduate School {where possible at least 2 weeks beforehand} to explain the extenuating circumstances. With the agreement of the examiners, the Research Degrees Officer will then set a new deadline for submission of the corrections which will take account of the nature of the extenuating circumstances. If the Research Degrees Officer is only made aware of the failure to meet the 3, 6 or 18 month deadline by the examiners, s/he will request an explanation from the candidate. If there are extenuating circumstances, a new deadline for submission of the corrections will be set with the agreement of the examiners. If there are no extenuating circumstances, a new submission deadline will be set and the candidate may be subject to attending another viva. In the event that a candidate fails to meet the new submission deadline and has no extenuating circumstances, they will fail their PhD.

In the event that a candidate does not send their revised thesis to the examiner(s) or their nominee within the deadline set, and has not been in touch with the supervisory team/Graduate School in the interim, every endeavour will be made to contact them (including sending a letter by recorded delivery to the candidate's last known address) up to one month after the submission deadline with the following request/information:

- 1) That they attend a meeting of the Postgraduate Academic Progress Committee on a set date to explain any extenuating circumstances;
- 2) That non-attendance at the Postgraduate Academic Progress Committee meeting without a satisfactory explanation will result in the automatic withdrawal of registration;
- 3) That the candidate will have the right of appeal following normal College procedures.

This procedure will also apply if a candidate has not submitted their thesis within 4 years (pro-rata for part-time candidates) from the date of registration (excluding any approved interruptions) and does not reply to any communication from their supervisors, the Graduate School or Advice Centre staff.

## **Appeals Procedure**

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The candidate will have the right of appeal against the decision through the College's appeals procedure. The Appeals procedure can be found under 'General' at the following link:  
<http://www.rvc.ac.uk/about/the-rvc/academic-quality-regulations-procedures>

## Overview of the Examination Process

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