

The Research Degree Examination

1. Appointment of Examiners

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

- 1.1 For all students registered for a research degree at the RVC, examiners for MPhil, PhD and the research component of the DProf examinations 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 in a timely manner. It is strongly recommended that nominations are submitted to the meeting occurring no later than 4 months before anticipated submission of the thesis.
- 1.2 Supervisors must complete a standard [examiner nomination](#) form. Forms are found on the Graduate School site on RVC Learn. They must be submitted to the Postgraduate Programme Management Team via pgadmin@rvc.ac.uk no later than 14 working days before the Committee meets. Notice of meetings is posted on the Intranet.
- 1.3 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 thesis abstract.)
- 1.4 Two examiners must be nominated of whom one is normally an internal examiner 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 is expected to have experience of examining University of London PhDs. 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 and an Independent Chair with experience of examining for the University of London 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 or one of the assessors at annual appraisal. 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 Chair who has experience of examining for the University of London should be appointed. An examiner with no or limited experience of examining level 8 research degrees (or level 7, for MPhil examinations) should always be paired with a highly experienced co-examiner.
- 1.5 *Viva voce* examinations for research degrees will normally be held face-to-face. In circumstances where this may be logistically or otherwise practically challenging, permission may be given to conduct a *viva* using video conferencing facilities such as Zoom or Teams. This can be either in a hybrid format (meaning at least two participants are face-to-face in a room on campus, and one or more participants join the examination remotely) or fully online (all participants join the examination remotely, using the video conferencing technology). As the College of registration is the RVC, it is the Research Degrees Committee (RDC) at the RVC that gives permission for an oral examination to take place via video conference. Permission for the *viva* to take place using video conferencing facilities will be sought when supervisors submit examiner nominations for consideration by the RDC and an Independent Chair will need to be present during online or hybrid vivas.

- 1.6 The Exams Office will email the student, supervisors and all examiners to confirm the appointments.

2. Thesis requirements

2.1 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.

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

2.2 Content and Structure

2.2.1 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 student 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 appendices.]

- Give a critical assessment of the literature, describe the methods 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).

2.2.2 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 student 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 appendices.]

- 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.

2.2.3 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

A Word or PDF copy of the thesis should be sent by e-mail, to the Postgraduate Programme Management Team via pgadmin@rvc.ac.uk before or on the submission deadline. This will be run through Turnitin (plagiarism software). Along with the electronic copy of the thesis, students must submit the Consent to Publish and Declaration of Originality and Word count forms. These are available on the Graduate School site on RVC [Learn](#).

If the examiner/s have requested a hard copy, it should be bound as per RVC specifications (see the instructions on Submission, Format and Binding) and students should arrange for the thesis to be sent directly to the examiner/s. Students should take an additional copy of the thesis to the oral exam. Delivery costs can be claimed back from the Exams Office. Please email examspg@rvc.ac.uk for more information.

The supervisor is to arrange a date for the viva (oral examination) with the examiners and notify the Exams Office (examspg@rvc.ac.uk). The supervisor is responsible for arranging the room booking, notifying any others concerned, ordering appropriate refreshments and organising Teams or Zoom meetings should the viva be approved to take place as hybrid or fully online.

4. Examination of the Thesis

The thesis is read and evaluated by the examiners and you will be asked to attend an oral examination (viva) either in person, hybrid or fully online. This is normally held within 3 months of submission of the thesis.

5. The Oral Examination

Viva voce examinations for research degrees will normally be held face-to-face. In circumstances where this may be logistically or otherwise practically challenging, permission may be given to conduct a viva using video conferencing facilities such as Zoom or Teams. This can be either in a hybrid format (meaning at least two participants are face-to-face in a room on campus, and one or more participants join the examination remotely) or fully online (all participants join the examination remotely, using the video conferencing technology).

As the College of registration is the RVC, it is the Research Degrees Committee (RDC) at the RVC that gives permission for an oral examination to take place via video conferencing. Permission for the viva to take place using video conferencing facilities will be sought when supervisors submit examiner nominations for consideration by the RDC. Explanation will need to be provided as to why it is preferable to use video conferencing facilities rather than conduct the viva face-to-face (this may for example include one of the examiners and/or the candidate being overseas) and it must be confirmed that all participants have agreed to the proposed format of the oral examination. The RDC has the right to disallow a hybrid or fully online viva if there does not seem to be good reason for doing so. Student preference alone, without logistical or other practical

issues complicating a face-to-face examination, will not normally be a reason for approving a hybrid or fully online viva. Extenuating circumstances can be put forward (this can be in confidence, e.g. via the Advice Centre) for which holding a viva using video conferencing facilities is recommended as a 'reasonable adjustment' to the assessment process.

If the oral examination (viva) is taking place in person, it should take place at the RVC (Camden or Hawkshead campus).

Any students with a disability who are unable to undertake the usual viva must have discussed appropriate alternative arrangements with their supervisor and the student support manager and/or medical advisors if appropriate. **They must send notification, in writing, of the recommended adjustments to the Exams Office (examspg@rvc.ac.uk) at or before thesis submission.**

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

Students are required to take an exact copy of the thesis to the viva, although it does not need to be a hard-bound copy. With the student's and examiners' permission, the supervisor may attend the viva, but must not participate unless directly requested by the examiners.

Normally there will be 2 examiners, one from the University of London 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. When 2 external examiners are used and 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 Chair (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. An Independent Chair will also be required if the viva is taking place fully online or in hybrid form.

At the oral examination, the examiners will be establishing that the work is the student's own and that the student understands the work they have done. The student 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. Students should be prepared to answer both very detailed questions about their work and those on the broader context of their studies.

6. PhD Examination Outcomes

There are a number of options open to the examiners in determining the result of the **PhD examination**. They may recommend that:

6.1 The Candidate be awarded the degree of PhD

6.1.1 The candidate be **awarded** the degree of Doctor of Philosophy without further work.

6.1.2 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.

6.2 The Candidate be permitted to re-submit for the degree of PhD

6.2.1 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.

6.2.2 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.

6.2.3 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.

6.2.4 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.

6.3 **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.

6.4 **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.

Students are normally told the examiners' recommendation immediately after the oral examination. They will be officially informed of the result by the Exams Office and will receive a copy of the examiners' joint report, which will document any required changes. Students and supervisors are reminded that the Exams Office will not send official notification of a result to the University of London until an electronic 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 student to the College have been paid. The degree certificate will be sent by the University 3-6 months after this. If, for a specific purpose, earlier certification is required, the Postgraduate Programme Management Team can provide a provisional statement.

Students 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 student not reaching the required standard, the Head of the Graduate School will inform the student about the options available. The student and supervisor should then discuss the way forward.

7. MPhil Examination Outcomes

There are a number of options open to the examiners in determining the result of the **MPhil examination**. They may recommend that:

7.1 **The Candidate be awarded the degree of MPhil**

7.1.1 The candidate be **awarded** the degree of Master of Philosophy without further work.

7.1.2 The candidate be awarded the degree of Master of Philosophy **subject to minor amendments** to the text made **within 3 months** and to the satisfaction of the internal examiner.

7.2 **The Candidate be permitted to re-submit for the degree of MPhil**

7.2.1 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.

7.2.2 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.

7.2.3 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.

7.2.4 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.

7.3 The Candidate be adjudged to have failed to satisfy the examiners for award of MPhil

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

8. DProf Examination Outcomes

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

8.1 The Candidate be awarded the degree of VetD

8.1.1 The candidate be **awarded** the degree of VetD without further work.

8.1.2 The candidate be awarded the degree of VetD **subject to minor amendments** to the text made **within 3 months** and to the satisfaction of the internal examiner.

8.2 The Candidate be permitted to re-submit for the degree of VetD

8.2.1 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.

8.2.2 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.

8.2.3 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.

8.2.4 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.

8.3 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.

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

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

Candidates are normally told the examiners' recommendation immediately after the oral examination. They will be officially informed of the result by the Exams Office and will receive a copy of the examiners' joint report which will document any required changes. Candidates and supervisors are reminded that the Exams Office will not send official notification of a result to the University of London until an electronic 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 3-6 months after this. If, for a specific purpose, earlier certification is required, the Postgraduate Programme Management Team 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 Head of the Graduate School will inform them about the options available. The candidate and their supervisor should then discuss the way forward.

9. Thesis Revisions

The student 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, the student may be given 3 months (minor revisions), 6 or 18 months (major revisions) to complete the changes and re-submit the thesis. The revised thesis, together with an itemised list of changes made, should be emailed to the Exams Office (examspg@rvc.ac.uk) and they will correspond with the examination team. Students and 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 students allow sufficient time to make the required revisions. Supervisors will continue to provide advice throughout the process of revising the thesis.

10. Submission of Thesis Amendments

In the event that a student thinks it unlikely they will meet the 3-, 6- or 18-month deadline, they should contact the Exams Office via examspg@rvc.ac.uk (where possible at least 2 weeks beforehand) to explain the extenuating circumstances. With the agreement of the examiners, the Exams Office will then set a new deadline for submission of the corrections which will take account of the nature of the extenuating circumstances. If the Exams Office does not receive the thesis by, is only made aware of the failure to meet the 3-, 6- or 18-month deadline by the examiners, they will request an explanation from the student. 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 student may be subject to attending another viva. In the event that a student fails to meet the new submission deadline and has no extenuating circumstances, the student will be referred to SPDS and could fail the examination.

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

- a) That they attend an SPDS meeting on a set date to explain any extenuating circumstances;
- b) That non-attendance at the SPDS meeting without a satisfactory explanation will automatically result in registration being terminated;

- c) That the student will have the right of appeal following normal College procedures.

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

11. Appeals Procedure

Under the Procedure for Consideration of Appeals by Candidates for Research Degrees, any student who wishes to appeal against the examiners' decision must make an application to the Academic Registrar within 2 months of notification of the result. Advice on making an appeal is available at the following link under the subheading Student Resolution and Compliance:

[Academic Quality, Regulations & Procedures - Academic Quality, Regulations & Procedures - The RVC - About - Royal Veterinary College, RVC](#)

