



# Guidelines for MPhil and PhD examinations

## *For use with Regulations for Research Degrees*

### Introduction

1. All MPhil and PhD examinations at the LSE must be conducted in accordance with the [Regulations for Research Degrees](#) and these Guidelines. Any questions concerning the Regulations or Guidelines should be raised with the PhD Academy in the first instance.
2. These Guidelines are written for doctoral programme directors, examiners, supervisors and candidates and should be used to inform all parties about how an MPhil or PhD examination is to be conducted. In the case of a re-examination under the School's Regulations, any differences in the process are stated in the relevant section of these Guidelines.
3. All matters (aside from the logistical arrangements for a viva examination) relating to an individual examination are confidential to the candidate, the supervisors and the examiners (and where relevant, the internal chair approved by the Research Degrees Subcommittee); no one involved in the examination process should contact any third party on any matter relating to the examination other than those named in these Guidelines.

### Timetable for examination

4. The viva examination should take place **within three months of the examiners having received the thesis**. The examiners' decision should be confirmed to the PhD Academy **within two weeks of the viva being held** (see also paragraphs 32-34 of this document). If there is difficulty in complying with this timeframe, examiners are asked to inform the PhD Academy at the earliest possibility.

### Examination requirements

5. All MPhil and PhD examinations at the LSE consist of an independent examination of a thesis by each examiner and a viva examination, which will be conducted in English. Candidates must attend for examination at a place and time the School determines. The oral examination may be held
  - in person at LSE; or
  - remotely with all participants attending by video conference; or
  - in mixed-mode, with some participants attending in person at the LSE and others attending remotely.
6. For re-examinations, it is open to the examiners to determine whether or not a second oral examination (on the basis of the revised thesis) is required. The examiners can take this decision either at the time of the original examination or after receiving and reading the revised thesis.
7. All theses must meet the requirements set out at paragraphs 46-48 of the [Regulations for Research Degrees](#). MPhil theses must meet the additional requirements at paragraphs 52-53. PhD theses must meet the additional requirements at paragraphs 50-51.
8. The School allows the format of a thesis to be either a conventional monograph or, where departments permit, a series of papers. All theses are examined in the same way, regardless of format: a thesis submitted as a series of papers must meet the same requirements as a conventional monograph. Requirements for a series of papers can be found in paragraph 48.3 of the [Regulations for Research Degrees](#).
9. The School has published a [statement on editorial help](#) which sets out the level of editorial help candidates are permitted to use when producing any written work. A copy of this statement is sent to the examiners (with the thesis) and candidates are required to declare (in the [front pages of their thesis](#)) any editorial help they have used. If examiners have any concerns either on reading a thesis or during the viva examination as to whether the work being examined is the candidate's own, they should discuss these concerns immediately with the PhD Academy.

## Examination process

10. The PhD Academy, on behalf of the School's Research Degrees Subcommittee, is responsible for oversight of the examination process and ensuring examiners are appointed in accordance with School regulations and requirements. Questions relating to the examination process should be addressed to the PhD Academy in the first instance.

11. It is for departments to determine the mode (in person, remote or mixed) in which the viva is conducted.

### In all cases (in person, remote and mixed mode)

- Practical arrangements for the viva examination (date, time and venue/mode) will be made by the candidate's department, usually by the lead supervisor or PhD programme manager. Departments must report the date and time of the viva to the PhD Academy as soon as possible, once agreed.
- The candidate's department must provide the examiners and candidate with an administrative contact who will be responsible for logistical arrangements and assistance, for example, in case of problems with attendance or delays.
- All participants must be provided with contact details for a member of the supervisory team if they do not attend at the viva. The role of supervisors (or their alternates; see below) is to serve as a readily available contact to assist the candidate and examiners, if requested, in case of (regulatory, technical or well-being) problems arising during the viva - for example, when the examiners need to decide whether to pause or postpone a viva.
- *Alternates:* If none of the supervisory team will be contactable during the viva, the candidate's department must ensure that a named academic contact will be available throughout the viva to support the candidate and examiners. The named academic contact may be the doctoral programme director or any other member of academic staff from the candidate's department with experience of conducting doctoral examinations. Their role will not involve attending at the viva or participating in the assessment of the thesis.
- Though it is recommended to keep one of the supervisors (or their alternates) 'on call' for the duration of the viva, there is no formal requirement to do so if an Internal Chair has been appointed by the Research Degrees Sub-Committee to oversee the examination (see *Role of the Internal Chair* and *Appendix B* below).
- Arrangements for the viva must include sufficient time for a pre-viva meeting of the examiners (and, where appropriate, the Internal Chair) to confer in private first.
- Arrangements for the conduct of the exam, including any adjustments recommended in the candidate's "My Adjustments" Plan /Inclusion Plan, must be confirmed and communicated to participants at least one week before the examination (See Annex A for guidance on recording vivas).
- Where appropriate, LSE IT Service Desk can be contacted for support on +44 (0)20 7898 5000 or by email at [IT.servicedesk@lse.ac.uk](mailto:IT.servicedesk@lse.ac.uk).

### Remote viva (all participants attending remotely)

- Remote vivas must be conducted using remote platforms supported by the School: Zoom, Microsoft Teams or Skype.
- When setting the time of the viva, time zone differences between the participants must be taken into account.

### In person viva (all participants attending in person and on campus)

- In person vivas must be scheduled to take place in a suitable venue (re: size, location, privacy). The department must ensure that refreshments are made available for the examiners and candidate. At minimum, water should be provided.

### Mixed-mode vivas (at least one participant attending remotely, and two or more participants attending at LSE in person)

- This mode involves, typically, one examiner joining the viva remotely with the candidate and one examiner attending on campus.
- Candidates and examiners may not attend in person together other than at LSE without prior approval from the Research Degrees Sub-Committee.
- Arrangements for those attending remotely must align with the requirements for remote vivas.
- Arrangements for those attending in person must align with the requirements for in-person vivas.

### Role of the Internal Chair

- Annex B below sets out when the appointment of an Internal Chair may be required.
- The candidate's supervisor/s may not act as the Chair and a suitable experienced academic member of staff from the department should be nominated.
- Internal Chairs are appointed to oversee the conduct of the viva and to provide guidance to the examiners on the examination process in line with School regulations.
- The Chair is not involved in the academic assessment of the thesis and as such is not expected to question the candidate about the work being examined. The Chair will not be provided with a copy of the thesis.
- Where a Chair decides that action is required on regulatory, technical or well-being grounds related to the viva, the following options are available following consultation with the participants:
  - to seek advice from the PhD Academy on the appropriate course of action
  - to continue with the examination and to provide a report to the PhD Academy for consideration of the Chair of the Research Degrees Sub Committee
  - to temporarily pause the examination pending resolution of serious technical difficulties and/or serious outstanding questions about the courses of action permitted
  - to postpone the examination.

### Guidance to Internal Chairs

- Advice can be sought from the PhD Academy on any issue arising during the examination.
- Internal Chairs should introduce themselves at the start of the examination, outline their role and clarify that the examination is taking place under normal School regulations.
- Except where the Internal Chair's advice is sought on regulatory or technical issues, the Chair will not take an active role in the examination other than to oversee the conduct of the viva in a manner agreed in advance with the examiners.
- Should the Internal Chair have cause for concern regarding the wellbeing of the candidate, the examination should be paused while advice is sought on the appropriate next steps.

- At the conclusion of the viva the Internal Chair will close the meeting and the examiners will then continue with the next steps of the examination process in accordance with School regulations.

12. The School will reimburse examiner travel, accommodation and subsistence in line with the criteria set out in the examiner expenses claim form, which is available [here](#). Departments and examiners should read these guidelines carefully before making any travel plans.

13. **Candidates should not be involved in any direct contact with their examiners until the viva examination:** candidates should not send their thesis (in hard or electronic copy) to examiners (theses can only be sent out by the PhD Academy) or be responsible for making any practical arrangements for the viva examination (this is done by the candidate's department).

#### **In advance of the viva examination: the examiners' preliminary reports**

14. In the case of a re-examination if the examiners have determined that no further oral examination is necessary, the re-examination will be conducted on the basis of the revised thesis alone; therefore paragraphs 15-27 of these Guidelines do **not** apply.

15. Examiners are expected to read the thesis in full and in good time before the viva examination.

16. Each examiner will identify specific matters they will wish to take up with the candidate, which they are asked to indicate in an independent written preliminary report. Typically, the preliminary report identifies particular areas which the examiner believes should be explored with the candidate during the viva and, if wished, a tentative recommendation for the result of the examination, based on an assessment of the thesis. Neither the preliminary reports nor any tentative recommendation on the examination outcome should be shared with the candidate at this stage.

17. Examiners will share their report with each other in advance of the viva examination. Examiners should note that their preliminary reports will be sent to the candidate at the end of the examination process.

18. If the examiners have any queries about the School's requirements for the award of the MPhil or PhD or about the regulations they should contact the PhD Academy.

#### **The viva examination**

19. At the viva examination, the examiners must have available the thesis, *Regulations for Research Degrees*, these Guidelines and their preliminary reports. The candidate must have available their own copy of the thesis (which will be paginated in the same way as the version sent to the examiners).

20. Before the viva commences, the examiners will take the time to discuss the areas they wish to explore (see paragraph 16) during the viva examination.

21. Supervisors can attend the viva examination as observers, provided that the candidate has not indicated otherwise. Supervisors do not have the right to take part in the examination but may contribute if invited to do so by the examiners. Such contributions should usually be made at the end of the viva to ensure the candidate has the fullest opportunity during the oral examination to answer the examiners' questions. No-one other than the examiners, the candidate, the supervisors (where permitted) and the Internal Chair (where appointed) may be present at a viva examination.

22. Reasonable adjustments to examination arrangements are only considered on the basis of the candidate's "My Adjustments" Plan/ Inclusion Plan. The PhD Academy will advise examiners of any additional arrangements required by a candidate for the viva examination. However, if examiners are alerted by the supervisor(s) or the candidate to any disability or illness, even in confidence, they should seek the advice of the PhD Academy.

23. The purpose of the viva examination is to examine the candidate on the thesis and, if the examiners see fit, on subjects relevant to it. At the beginning of the viva, the examiners should outline

the broad areas for discussion to the candidate. If the examiners will be questioning the candidate about matters beyond the immediate subject matter of the thesis, they should make it clear that they will be doing so and that the candidate will therefore not be expected to have the same level of knowledge of these matters as of the content of the thesis.

24. During the viva the examiners should establish whether all the [requirements for a thesis submitted for the MPhil or PhD](#) have been met and that the thesis is genuinely the work of the candidate.

25. The viva should be conducted in such a way that the candidate has adequate opportunity, encouragement, and time to explain their research and to defend the thesis. There is no prescribed time limit for this purpose. Candidates are entitled to request short breaks at appropriate intervals.

26. In attending the viva, the candidate is declaring themselves fit to sit the examination. If a candidate is unwell immediately prior to the viva such that they are unable to attend it, they must immediately notify the PhD Academy and the departmental administrative contact responsible for arranging their viva. The candidate will be asked to provide relevant medical evidence in connection to the illness, and the PhD Academy will provide advice on the next steps.

27. If a candidate attends but becomes so unwell or distressed during the viva as to be unable to proceed, the viva may be stopped at the candidate's request or on the examiners' initiative. After consultation with the candidate, the examiners will decide whether to resume the viva later (either on the same day if the candidate has recovered or on another occasion) or to conclude the oral examination at this point. The latter option is only available if, in the estimation of the examiners, the viva up to that point has yielded enough evidence for them to make a final decision on the outcome of the examination. The circumstances that led to the viva to be stopped, resumed and/or concluded need to be set out in the Examiners' final report. Examiners must contact the PhD Academy regarding their decision as a matter of urgency.

28. If the examiners feel they have been put under moral pressure (such as alluding to the consequences of failure) or offered any kind of incentive to award a pass, the examination must be adjourned without a decision being reached and the situation must be reported immediately to the PhD Academy.

### Reaching a decision

29. At the end of the viva examination (once the candidate has left the room) or after examining the revised thesis (in the case of a re-examination where no second viva is held) the examiners will need to reach a decision on the outcome. The options are set out in the [Regulations for Research Degrees](#) and on the Examiners' Report Form (a copy of which will be provided when the thesis is sent out). Both examiners are considered equal and must reach an agreed decision on the examination outcome.

30. The examiners have discretion to consult the supervisor(s) irrespective of whether they were present at the viva, or whether no viva was held in the case of a re-examination. Where examiners have difficulty in reaching an agreed decision, or where clarification over the Regulations is needed, advice should be sought from the PhD Academy.

31. Where the examiners decide that revisions are required, they are to specify the timeframe for completing these as directed under the Regulations. The length of time required should be based on the **nature and scale of revisions that are necessary rather than on the assessment of the candidate's ability to complete the work within a particular timeframe**. LSE has procedures for considering adjustments to timeframes based on mitigating circumstances or a candidate's commitments. Where an individual candidate is granted a period of revisions and has difficulty in meeting the deadline on the basis of other commitments they can request additional time once the examiners' decision has been confirmed. Such requests must be made by the candidate to the PhD Academy. Requests, on grounds of mitigating circumstances, are decided upon by the Research Degrees Subcommittee Chair who may consult with the examiners.

32. Where a candidate is required to complete revisions to their thesis for re-examination, they are entitled to be re-registered and thus to continue to receive supervision. Apart from offering support

and guidance to the candidate during this period, the supervisor plays no other role in the examination process. For example, the examiners are not permitted to delegate to a supervisor the task of reading a revised thesis and confirming that it now meets the criteria for an award under the School's regulations.

### **Notification to the candidate**

33. Where a viva examination has taken place and particularly if the decision is that the candidate has passed or will pass subject to making minor amendments to the thesis, examiners may want to advise the candidate verbally and informally of their decision at the end of their deliberations. Examiners are advised to exercise particular care if doing so and always to make clear to the candidate that the result is not formal and final until the School has confirmed it to them. As part of the examination paperwork and ideally in the examiners' Joint Report, examiners must provide the PhD Academy with a clear explanation of the revisions the candidate needs to complete. In the case of a re-examination where no viva has taken place, the examiners' decision should always be conveyed to the PhD Academy in the first instance.

34. The PhD Academy will confirm in writing the examiners' decision to the candidate after receipt of all the required paperwork from the examiners (see paragraphs 36-37). No official notification of the result can be issued until the examiners' reports have been received and processed and any anomalies resolved. This can normally take up to one month following a viva examination and it is crucial that examiners submit all required reports/paperwork upon completion of the examination.

35. Candidates should not make direct contact with their examiners following the viva examination to discuss their result unless the examiners have given their permission for this to happen. It is not the responsibility of the examiners to support the candidate through corrections and resubmissions.

### **Reporting to the School on the examination**

36. Examiners must provide the PhD Academy, by email ([phdacademy@lse.ac.uk](mailto:phdacademy@lse.ac.uk)), with the following completed paperwork **within two weeks of the viva having taken place**:

- (a) examiners' report form - confirming the examination outcome;
- (b) a written joint examiners' report - indicating the basis on which the decision has been reached and including a list of any revisions the candidate is now required to make; and
- (c) both examiners' preliminary reports.

There are no templates for (b) and (c) and examiners can determine the format they wish to present the reports.

37. The PhD Academy will provide a copy of the examiners' reports to the candidate when it confirms the examination outcome to them.

### **PhD Academy Contact Details**

For examiners and LSE staff:

Email: [phdacademy@lse.ac.uk](mailto:phdacademy@lse.ac.uk)

For PhD Candidates

Please send an enquiry via the [Candidate Enquiry Form](#). If you wish to set up a remote/phone meeting to discuss your situation, please indicate by which mode of communication you would like (Zoom, Teams, Phone-please provide your contact telephone number).

Research Degrees Subcommittee  
August 2022

**ANNEX A** -Recording vivas as reasonable adjustments where stipulated in candidates' "My Adjustments" Plan/ Inclusion Plan.

1. The recording is to be used for the purpose of the viva and to aid any revisions that may be required. No one other than those participating in the viva may be given access to the recording and all attendees must agree that the recording will in no way be shared beyond the attendees except if required for any appeal process relating to the examination.
2. The department should share the link of the recording with the candidate and the link must be deleted by the department within one month of the candidate's award date. If the recording is in any other format, then the candidate must delete the recording within one month of their award date and send an email to the PhD Academy to confirm this ([phdacademy@lse.ac.uk](mailto:phdacademy@lse.ac.uk)).
3. The department will need to make points 1 and 2 clear at the start of the viva.

**ANNEX B** – Summary on Internal Chairs

**When is an Internal Chair required/not required to oversee a PhD or MPhil viva?**

This depends on the experience of the proposed examiners:

- (1) There is no requirement for an Internal Chair if the RDSC subject panel are satisfied that the proposed examiners, between them, have a good understanding of the expectations of the LSE examination process AND that there is independent external oversight. This applies even in cases where both examiners are external to LSE and/or when only one of the examiners has experience of UK PhD examinations.
- (2) If the proposed examiners do not meet these requirements, the options are
  - (a) to appoint an Internal Chair to oversee the viva, OR
  - (b) to replace one of the examiners such that the requirements are met, OR
  - (c) to nominate a third examiner with appropriate experience.

**If in any doubt, please contact the PhD Academy well in advance of the viva!**

## Review schedule

Review interval	New review start date	New review due by
1 year	April 2023	May 2023

## Version history

Version	Publication date	Approved by	Notes
1.0	August 2021	Research Degrees Sub-Committee	Extant policy.
1.1	October 2022	Research Degrees Sub-Committee (details agreed by Chair's action)	Stylistic updates throughout. Specific updates below. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Point 5: Introduction of reference to different modes of viva.</li><li>- Point 11: Significant update to clarify the nature of the support departments are expected to provide for each viva format (in person, hybrid, or remote).</li><li>- Point 12: Removal of references to specific details of the examiner travel, accommodation and subsistence claims policy.</li><li>- Point 32 (previously point 31): Clarification that all students who are required to complete corrections of any kind will be entitled to be re-registered and receive supervision.</li></ul>

## Contacts

Query type	Contact	Email
Operational queries	PhD Academy, Research Degrees Management Team	<a href="mailto:phdacademy@lse.ac.uk">phdacademy@lse.ac.uk</a>
Policy queries	Peter Mills	<a href="mailto:p.b.mills@lse.ac.uk">p.b.mills@lse.ac.uk</a>

## Communications and Training

Query	Answer	Notes
Will this document be publicised through internal communications?	<u>Yes</u> /No	By email to all current Doctoral Programme Directors and programme managers from <a href="mailto:phdacademy@lse.ac.uk">phdacademy@lse.ac.uk</a> .
Will training needs arise from this document?	Yes/ <u>No</u>	