



Guidelines for MPhil and PhD examinations

For use with Regulations for Research Degrees

Introduction

1. All MPhil and PhD examinations at the LSE should 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 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 the 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 at LSE in London or using approved video conferencing facilities.
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. They 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 and PhD theses 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. Regardless of format, all theses are examined in the same way: a thesis submitted as a series of papers must meet the same requirements as a conventional monograph. Requirements for a series of paper 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. The practical arrangements for the viva examination (date, time and venue/format) will be made by the candidate's department usually by the supervisor or PhD Manager. Departments should consider the following when making such arrangements:

Remote viva

- using remote platforms supported by the School: Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Skype
- setting the time of the viva to allow time for the examiners to confer privately first or to take into consideration any time zone differences of any of the participants
- confirmation of the arrangements for the examiners and the candidate any adjustments to the viva recommended in the candidate's "My Adjustments" Plan /Inclusion Plan*
- Departments are required to appoint a Named Academic Contact for online vivas so that examiners and candidates have a readily available contact point to discuss issues during the viva. The Nominated Academic Contact must be an LSE member of academic staff. Academic Departments do not need to formally appoint Nominated Academic Contacts with the School and RDSC through the examiner nomination process, but they are responsible for ensuring that participants are advised of the name and contact details.

In person viva:

- suitability of the venue for the viva (size, location, privacy);
- start time of the viva to allow time for the examiners to confer privately first, if required;
- provision of refreshments for the examiners and candidate (it is advised that water is made available);
- contact point for examiners and the candidate, for example if there is a problem in arriving at the School in time for the start of the viva;
- contact details for the supervisor if they are not going to be present at the viva;
- confirmation of the arrangements for the examiners and the candidate to ensure that all parties have the full information on venue (including provision of a map for anyone external to the School), start and likely end times and other information they may need to know;
- any adjustments to the viva recommended in the candidate's "My Adjustment's" Plan/Inclusion Plan.*

Mixed-mode vivas:

- This is primarily for where one examiner will join the viva remotely with candidate and one examiner in attendance on campus.
- A named contact point is not required for this examination as support is expected to be readily available from colleagues and relevant services on campus.
- Arrangements- physical and remote- must be in line with the standard procedures governing remote and in person vivas- please see immediately above.

*Please see Annex for guidance on recording vivas as reasonable adjustments where stipulated in the candidate's "My Adjustments" Plan/ Inclusion Plan.

Role of internal chair

- Where there are considerations around examiners' procedural expertise of UK examinations, or any other exceptional consideration for an examination, either the Academic Department or RDSC may require a Chair for the examination to be appointed from within the Academic Department. The candidate's supervisor/s may not act as the chair and a suitable experienced academic member of the staff should be nominated from the department.
- The role of the chair is to oversee the conduct of the viva and to provide guidance to the examiners on the examination process in line with School regulations.
- Where a Chair decides that action is required on either regulatory, technical or wellbeing issues 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 postpone the examination.
- 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.

Guidance to chairs

- The Chair should introduce themselves at the start of the examination, outline the role they are undertaking, and clarify that the examination is taking place under normal school regulations
- LSE IT Service Desk can be contacted on +44 (0)20 7898 5000 or by email at IT.servicedesk@lse.ac.uk
- Except where the 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.
- Should the 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.
- Advice can be sought from the PhD Academy on issues arising during the examination.
- At the conclusion of the viva the Chair will close the meeting and the examiners will then continue with the next steps of the examination process in accordance with the School regulations.
- The PhD Academy can be contacted via email: phdacademy@lse.ac.uk. If advice is needed on the day regarding regulatory or wellbeing issues, the Deputy Director of the PhD Academy, Marcus Cerny, can be contacted on Microsoft Teams.

12. For in-person vivas, in line with School's sustainability agenda, it should be noted that the School will not normally consider paying for flights. Maximum expenditure for other forms of travel is £250, and examiners are also eligible for 1 night of accommodation and subsistence. Where travel is not available within these constraints either a remote viva or alternative examiners should be considered. Please refer to the [examiner fees/expenses claim form](#) for full details.

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

13. 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 14-27 of this form do **not** apply.

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

15. 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.

16. 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.

17. 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

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

19. Before the viva commences, the examiners will take the time to discuss the areas they wish to explore (see paragraph 15) during the viva examination.

20. 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 supervisors and where relevant, the internal Chair/Named Academic Contact, and the candidate may be present at a viva examination.

21. 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.

22. 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 its outset, 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.

23. 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.

24. 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. It is also recommended that examiners should allow short breaks at appropriate points.

25. In attending the viva, the candidate is declaring themselves fit to do so. If a candidate is unwell immediately prior to the viva such that they are unable to attend it, they should immediately notify the PhD Academy. A candidate will be asked to provide the relevant medical evidence in connection to the illness and the PhD Academy will provide advice on this.

26. If a candidate attends the viva but becomes so unwell or distressed during it as to be unable to proceed, the examiners should, after such consultation with the candidate, decide whether to continue. If they do continue, they should note in their final report that the candidate was unwell. If they decide not to continue, they should determine whether they have enough evidence to make a decision or whether it will be necessary to continue the viva examination on another occasion. The candidate can also request that the viva be adjourned on the basis of ill health and after discussing the matter with the examiners. Examiners should contact the PhD Academy as a matter of urgency if a viva needs to be ended.

27. 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 should be ended without a decision being reached and a report made to the PhD Academy.

Reaching a decision

28. 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.

29. 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.

30. Where the examiners decide that a period of revisions is 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 an assessment of the candidate's ability to complete the work within a particular timeframe**. The LSE has procedures for considering adjustments to timeframes based on mitigating circumstances or candidate commitments. Where an individual candidate is granted a period of revisions and where they will have difficulty in meeting the deadline, for example, on the basis of other commitments they can request additional time to the period granted once the examiners' decision is confirmed to him/her. 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.

31. Where a candidate is required to complete major 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

32. 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 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.

33. 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 35-36). No official notification of the result can be issued until the 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 upon examiners submit all required reports/paperwork.

34. 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

35. Examiners must provide the PhD Academy, by email (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.

36. 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

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
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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 any corrections that may be given to the candidate. No one outside of those in the viva should be given access to the recording and that all attendees agree that the recording will in no way be shared beyond the attendees except if required for any appeals process relating to the examination.
2. The department should share the link of the recording with the candidate and the link should 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).
3. The department will need to make points 1 and 2 clear at the start of the viva.