

# RESEARCH DEGREE EXAMINATION GUIDELINES

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Research degrees examinations are administered by the [Assessments](#) office in the [Registry](#). If you require any advice or clarifications at any stage of the examination process, please do not hesitate to contact the Assessments office at [rdeaminations@lshtm.ac.uk](mailto:rdeaminations@lshtm.ac.uk). Examiners will be sent an electronic copy of the thesis to be examined. Examiners requesting a hard copy must contact the Assessments office no later than one month before the date of the viva examination.

## 1. EXAMINER FEES AND EXPENSES PROCEDURE

- 1.1 A fee of £150 is paid to each Examiner once the examination has taken place and they have fulfilled all their examining duties as described in this document.
2. The examination fee and any expenses will be paid upon receipt of the Examiners' final joint report by the [Registry](#).
- 2.1 External Examiners, meaning those outside of the University of London and Colleges, may claim travel and other expenses (including accommodation and subsistence) up to £350 only. Travel should be in line with LSHTM's [transport and sustainability policy](#). Trains should be used for journeys within the UK and from European destinations which are less than 8 hours by train from London. First class train tickets will not be reimbursed. The School reserves the right to refuse to pay any examiner expenses deemed to be unnecessary or excessive.
- 2.2 Claims should be submitted to the [Registry](#) at the conclusion of the examination process, but may be submitted earlier where advance travel booking is necessary.
- 2.3 The [forms](#) can be found on the School's website.

## 3. INDEPENDENT CHAIR

- 3.1 In some circumstances, an Independent Chair may be appointed for the oral examination of research degree students in addition to the Examiners. An Independent Chair may be appointed if it is beneficial to the student and the School; for example, if the nominated Examiners are relatively inexperienced at examining or if the student has a Learning Support Agreement that requires reasonable adjustments be made to the oral examination process. Chairs are always appointed for online vivas, hybrid vivas, LSHTM-Nagasaki University joint programme vivas, DrPH vivas, PhD by Publication vivas, and any vivas required following thesis resubmission. The decision on whether an Independent Chair should be appointed will be made by the Faculty Research Degree Director and will form part of the appointment of Examiners process.
- 3.2 Further [guidelines](#) about the process and requirements are available on the School's intranet.

## 4. THE DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION ACT

- 4.1 The Disability Discrimination Act requires institutions to make reasonable adjustments to assessments for students with physical disabilities or specific learning difficulties. Examiners must be advised of any special arrangements for a candidate with their appointment letter. However, if Examiners are informed directly by the Supervisor or the student of any disability, even in confidence, they should seek the advice of the [Student Adviser](#) so they can be appropriately briefed.
- 4.2 All examinations at the School are subject to the School's [Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy](#). All candidates are subject to the same academic criteria and requirements.

## **THESIS/ PORTFOLIO GUIDANCE**

### **5. THESIS CONSIDERATIONS**

In accordance with School [regulations](#):

#### **MPhil**

The scope of the thesis shall be what might reasonably be expected after two, or at most three years of full-time study (max 60,000 words).

The thesis shall meet the following criteria:

- (a) Consist of a student's own account of their investigations.
- (b) Be a record of original work or an ordered and critical exposition of existing knowledge in any field. There should be evidence that the field has been surveyed thoroughly.
- (c) Be an integrated whole and present a coherent argument.
- (d) Give a critical assessment of the relevant literature, describe the method of research and its findings and include a discussion on those findings.
- (e) Be written in English with satisfactory literary presentation.
- (f) Include a full reference list.
- (g) Demonstrate the student meets the threshold standards for the award of a **master's** degree in the UK (See [Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-awarding Bodies \(FHEQ\)](#), level 7).

#### **PhD**

The scope of the thesis shall be what might reasonably be expected after three years of full-time study (max 100,000 words).

The thesis shall meet the following criteria:

- (a) Consist of the student's own account of their investigations and indicate how they advance the study/knowledge of the subject.
- (b) Form a distinct contribution to the knowledge of the subject and afford evidence of originality shown by the discovery of new facts and/or the exercise of independent critical power.
- (c) Be an integrated whole and present a coherent argument.
- (d) Give a critical assessment of the relevant literature, describe the method of research and its findings, and include a discussion on those findings, and indicate in what respects they appear to the student to advance the study/knowledge of the subject.
- (e) Be written in English with satisfactory literary presentation.
- (f) Include a full reference list.
- (g) Demonstrate the student meets the threshold standards for the award of a **doctoral** degree in the UK (See [Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-awarding Bodies \(FHEQ\)](#). Level 8).

#### **DrPH**

DrPH students complete two research studies: RSI, the organisational and policy analysis (OPA), and RSII, the research thesis. **The primary focus of the DrPH viva is the RSII research thesis.** However, depending on the regulations on which the student is registered, you may also be required to examine the RSI/OPA. If necessary, a third examiner with knowledge of the RSI/OPA topic/field may be appointed.

The following table summarises the registration-specific requirements of the DrPH viva examination:

<b>Regulations</b>	<b>Submitted?</b>	<b>Assessment ratified by the DrPH exam board</b>	<b>What is examined at the viva?</b>
Pre-2018	RSII thesis *	RSI/OPA	RSII thesis
2018	RSI/OPA, RSII thesis	n/a	RSI/OPA, RSII thesis
2023	RSI/OPA, RSII thesis	RSI/OPA	RSII thesis

\* Word limit: pre-2018 regulations, 50,000; 2018 and 2023 regulations, 60,000.

Where the RSI/OPA has been summatively assessed by two independent LSHTM markers and the outcome ratified by the DrPH exam board (overseen by an independent external examiner), no further examination at the viva is required. In this case, the inclusion of the RSI/OPA in the student's submitted portfolio, is for information only.

If an assessment of the RSI/OPA is required at the viva examination, the examiners will be notified by the DrPH programme directors via the Registry RD Examinations team. In this case, the majority of the viva examination should still be dedicated to the RSII research thesis, consistent with the more substantive nature of the RSII research thesis.

The expectations of the RSI/OPA report and the RSII research thesis are described below.

**Research Study I (RSI):** an Organizational and Policy Analysis (OPA)

The OPA is a research project that provides DrPH students with the opportunity to observe and analyse the workings of a public health organisation in its policy environment and to gain a better understanding of how to develop effective public health organisations and policy. Progression to the OPA project component is subject to successful completion of the two compulsory core modules and the OPA project report is assessed internally by two independent assessors. Revisions maybe requested and submitted before the project is marked as 'ready for submission'

These revisions and the accompanying comments will be provided to the viva examiners as assurance that the RSI is deemed of a sufficient standard for a doctoral degree to be awarded.

**Research Study II (RSII):** a research thesis (RSII) presenting original, high-quality independent research equivalent in level to a PhD thesis but necessarily reduced in scope. The RSII may or may not be related to RSI. Students are expected to spend 18-21 months conducting and writing up the research thesis element. The scope of the thesis shall be what might reasonably be expected after eighteen months of full-time study.

The thesis shall meet the following criteria:

- (a) Consist of the student's own account of their investigations and must indicate in what respects they appear to them to advance the study of the subject.
- (b) Form a distinct contribution to the knowledge of the subject and afford evidence of originality shown by the discovery of new facts and/or the exercise of independent critical power.
- (c) Be an integrated whole and present a coherent argument.
- (d) Give a critical assessment of the relevant literature, describe the method of research and its findings, and include a discussion on those findings, and indicate in what respects they appear to the student to advance the study/knowledge of the subject.
- (e) Be written in English with satisfactory literary presentation.
- (f) Include a full reference list.
- (g) Demonstrate the student meets the threshold standards for the award of a **doctoral** degree in the UK  
(See [Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-awarding Bodies \(FHEQ\)](#), level 8).

**For MPhil, PhD and DrPH**

Relevant work by the student prepared for publication or already published may be included together with linking material. Linking material must be solely the work of the student and should include elements undertaken as part of the thesis research but which are not normally published (for example, description of lab-assay work-up, formative work to design data collection instruments). A general literature review and a concluding summary would normally be expected. Each element of work prepared for publication or already published which is included in the thesis must be accompanied by a statement, certified by the Supervisor, to indicate the role of the student in the work and the contributions of others. Work for which there are multiple authors, including that for which the student is not first author, is permitted in specific circumstances but the student must state the aspects of the work for which they had lead responsibility.

## **PhD by Publication**

Students following this route are expected to assemble a portfolio of at least four interconnected published works, accompanied by an analytic commentary of no more than 15,000 words and a statement describing the student's contribution to each publication and underlying research. The portfolio and published works therein shall fulfil the criteria for a PhD described above.

## **6. THESIS STYLES**

- 6.1 Some years ago, LSHTM expanded the traditional "book style" to allow the inclusion of published papers (sometimes called "research paper style"). Please note this is not the same as the PhD by Publication, for which a portfolio is submitted, as described above and in the programme specification). Importantly, a thesis can be a combination of the two styles, and there is a continuum between them. The option to include research papers means that sections that might otherwise be chapters can now be written as stand-alone research papers (including draft papers) and incorporated in that way. This saves unnecessary rewriting of material that has already been published and encourages timely publication of findings.
- 6.2 Each 'research paper' must be accompanied by a cover sheet signed by the Supervisor, either prefacing the paper or as a separate section (not as an appendix).
- 6.3 The form will include the details of the student's contribution, where and when it was or will be published and whether it was subject to academic peer review.

## **7. COVID-19 IMPACT STATEMENT**

Students whose work has been affected by COVID-19 are encouraged to include an impact statement with their thesis. This may include details of how COVID-19 has impacted the research (directly or indirectly); how the planned work would have fitted in the thesis/portfolio; and actions taken to mitigate the disruption. As a result of COVID-19 some students may have shifted their work and have a thesis/portfolio that is less coherent than usual.

Examiners should use their academic judgment when deciding whether, as set out in the regulations, the criteria for the degree have been met, whilst bearing in mind that they should judge the thesis in relation to what can be reasonably expected within a period of study (3 years FTE for a PhD or 18 months for a DrPH) ***that has been conducted in the context of disruption caused by COVID-19.***

Note: for the DrPH the period for the combined portfolio of Research Study I (OPA) and Research Study II (thesis) would be 2.5 years FTE.

# **THE ORAL EXAMINATION**

## **8. INFORMATION FOR EXAMINERS AND SUPERVISORS**

- 8.1 An oral examination will be held, other than in extenuating circumstances for which provision can be found in the [regulations](#).
- 8.2 Once the thesis/DrPH portfolio has been dispatched to the Examiners by the [Registry](#), the student's Supervisor is asked to contact the Examiners, the Independent Chair if applicable, and the student to arrange and confirm the time and place for the oral examination. This may be held in London or online using Zoom or a similar platform. The viva should normally be held no more than three months after the thesis has been submitted.
- 8.3 One Supervisor may attend the oral examination as an observer, at the discretion of the student, in which case the Examiners will be informed. The Supervisor must not participate in the examination.
- 8.4 Examiners may address questions to the supervisor during their pre-viva discussion. However, these will typically be limited to questions regarding the contributions of the student and others to the work presented in the thesis or challenges beyond the student's control that may have impeded research progress. All other questions concerning the thesis and the work presented therein should be addressed to the student during the oral examination.
- 8.5 The Examiner's Report Form has a section to indicate the date of the oral examination and whether the Supervisor was present. No persons other than the Examiners, Independent Chair if applicable, one Supervisor and the student should be present at the oral examination.

## **9. INFORMATION FOR EXAMINERS**

- 9.1 Examiners will receive a documentation pack sent by the [Registry](#), including the Examiner's Report Form.

## **10. PRELIMINARY INDEPENDENT REPORTS**

- 10.1 Each Examiner is asked to write an independent preliminary report on the thesis portfolio. It is expected that the Examiner will have read the thesis portfolio but not conferred with their fellow Examiner. This provides each Examiner with an opportunity to identify the areas that should be explored with the student during the oral examination, and if applicable, reach a tentative recommendation, based on a thorough assessment of the thesis or portfolio, for the outcome of the examination. Any recommendation should remain confidential from the candidate and be tempered by the fact that the oral examination is an integral part of the examination process and may change the outcome.
- 10.2 If any concerns arise during the reading of the thesis, Examiners should discuss these with the student's Supervisor (and independent Chair if appointed) in advance of the oral examination. If an Examiner has any queries about the School's processes and regulations for awarding a research degree, please contact the [Assessments Office](#).
- 10.3 Where a student has a Learning Support Agreement (LSA) that recommends reasonable adjustments to the oral examination (e.g. provision of an agenda or advance notice of the initial areas that the examiners would like to explore at the examination), these will be shared with the examiners by the independent Chair. All necessary communications with the student concerning the agreed reasonable adjustments must be carried out at least one week before the oral examination by the independent Chair on behalf of the examiners.
- 10.4 Please note that all matters relating to the examination are confidential and Examiners should not contact any third party, other than the independent Chair (if appointed), the Supervisors, the Assessments team in the [Registry](#), or Faculty staff involved in arranging the viva.
- 10.5 **The Examiners' preliminary reports must be submitted to the [Registry](#) before conducting the oral examination.** The Examiners should exchange their independent preliminary reports before conducting the oral examination.

## 11. THE ORAL EXAMINATION PROCESS

11.1 The purpose of the oral examination is to examine the student on the subject of their thesis and any other relevant subjects. Prior to the oral examination, Examiners should discuss and agree the strategy that will be used and outline it to the student at the outset. During the oral examination the Examiners will seek to establish that the thesis is genuinely the work of the candidate and that it meets all the requirements for a thesis submitted as an MPhil/PhD/DrPH as set out in the [Research Degree Regulations](#) and above). If there are any doubts that the thesis is genuinely the work of the candidate, the Examiners should contact the [Registry](#).

11.2 There are no set requirements about the conduct or duration of the oral examinations, but the student should be given adequate opportunity and encouragement to explain their research and defend their thesis. During a long oral examination, it is recommended that short breaks are offered at suitable points.

11.3 If the student becomes unwell or distressed during the oral examination to the extent that they are unable to continue, the Examiners should consult with the independent Chair (if appointed), Supervisor and student to decide whether to continue. If they decide to continue a note should be made in the Examiners' final report, stating that the student was unwell. If they agree not to continue the Examiners should decide if sufficient evidence has been provided to allow them to reach a final decision and, if not, agree to continue the oral examination on another occasion.

11.4 If the student offers the Examiners any incentives to award them with a pass or makes comments that put the Examiners under moral pressure (such as alluding to the consequences of failure for them) the examination should be terminated, and a report made to the [Head of Registry](#).

11.5 At the conclusion of the oral examination the student and Supervisor, if in attendance, should leave the room and allow the Examiners to confer on their initial assessment and decision in private. The independent Chair (if appointed) should remain in attendance to answer any procedural questions. The Examiners have the discretion to consult the Supervisor, irrespective of whether they were present, in particular if there are doubts over the appropriate decision to be made.

11.6 Examiners have seven results available to them as listed below:

- Pass;
- Pass, subject to minor amendments to be completed within **three months**. The necessary amendments should be set out clearly, preferably in writing, and be provided within **two weeks** of the oral examination. The Examiners, or their nominee, may provide the student with these amendments directly or this can be arranged through the [Assessments](#) team in the [Registry](#). In either case, Examiners should complete the [Examiners' Report Form](#) and return it, with any relevant documents, to the [Registry](#) within **two weeks** of the oral examination. The completed amendments should be reviewed by one or both examiners within one month of receipt of the corrected thesis;
- Pass, subject to major amendments to be completed within **six months**. The necessary amendments should be set out clearly, preferably in writing, and be provided within **two weeks** of the oral examination. The Examiners, or their nominee, may provide the student with these amendments directly or this can be arranged through the [Assessments](#) team in the [Registry](#). In either case, Examiners should complete the [Examiners' Report Form](#) and return it, with any relevant documents, to the [Registry](#) within **two weeks** of the oral examination. The completed amendments should be reviewed by one or both examiners within one month of receipt of the corrected thesis;
- Not pass, but the student is allowed to rewrite the thesis (and/or OPA for DrPH student on the new regulations) and resubmit within **18 months** for examination by the same Examiners. An oral examination may not be required on re-entry – this will be at the discretion of the Examiners;
- Not pass, but be allowed to submit to a further oral examination within **18 months** on the same thesis (and/or OPA for DrPH student on the new regulations) and by the same Examiners;
- Fail PhD, but has met the requirements for the MPhil, or may meet the requirements for the MPhil after revision of the thesis over a **three** or **12-month** period. This option is not applicable to DrPH or PhD by Publication examinations;
- Outright fail. No further entry to the PhD, DrPH or MPhil degree will be permitted.

11.7 It is recognised that if the student has passed, or will pass with minor amendments, the Examiners may wish to inform the student informally after the oral examination. Examiners should take particular care when doing so, and always make clear to the student that the result is not formal and final until they receive confirmation of the result from the [Registry](#).

11.8 Where present, an Independent Chair will be able to advise and facilitate the above procedures.

11.9 Once the oral examination has concluded and a decision has been reached the Examiners are required to complete and sign the [Examiners' Report Form](#) to confirm the outcome.

## 12. THE JOINT REPORT

12.1 Examiners are required to write a joint report giving the grounds for their decision. The joint report should be on a separate sheet and include the following information at the beginning:

- Student's name and Faculty;
- Thesis Title;
- Signatures of both Examiners;
- Date.

12.2 The report should indicate how the thesis has met the requirements of a MPhil, PhD or DrPH (please see the [Research Degree Regulations](#) above and as set out in the [Examiners' Report Form](#)), but should not cross reference the Examiners' preliminary reports, unless the Examiners want the student to receive a copy of the preliminary reports.

12.3 The Examiners are asked to agree the arrangements for drafting and finalising their joint report. This should be sent with the examiners' report form to the [Assessments](#) team in the [Registry](#) by email. Their final decision on the outcome should be agreed by the end of the oral examination.

12.4 If the Examiners decide to refer the student to re-write and resubmit their thesis portfolio within 18 months, they should clearly indicate in what ways the current thesis portfolio fails to satisfy the requirements of a MPhil, PhD or DrPH degree and direct the student to the revisions needed to ensure a pass. Examiners may also indicate in their joint report if the student will be required to attend a further oral examination once the revisions have been completed. Examiners may also choose to reserve this decision until the revised thesis or portfolio has been received and reviewed.

12.5 If the Examiners determine that the student has failed the PhD requirements but met the requirements for the MPhil they should indicate in their joint report the basis for their decision not to allow resubmission for the PhD and indicate how the requirements for the MPhil have been met or might be satisfied if the student needs to revise the thesis prior to resubmission.

12.6 Please note that the MPhil Degree is an award in its own right and may not be awarded as compensation for a failed PhD.

12.7 If the Examiners decide to fail the student with no option to resubmit for a PhD or MPhil, they must indicate the basis for their decision to reject the other options.

12.8 Examiners have the right to make comments in confidence in a separate report to the School. These will normally be forwarded to the relevant Faculty. For further guidance please see section 9.9.1.6 of the [Research Degree Regulations](#).

12.9 The Examiners' joint reports are kept by the [Registry](#).

## 13. REPORTING TIMELINE

13.1 Examiners should complete and submit their independent preliminary reports to the Assessments team in the Registry **before the oral examination**. These will remain confidential but may be shared with the candidate **after** the oral examination at the examiners' discretion.

- 13.2 It is important that the Examiners complete the [Examiners' Report Form](#) and joint report, and send these to [Assessments](#) team in the [Registry](#) as soon as possible after the oral examination has taken place. **These reports should be submitted within two weeks of the oral examination.**
- 13.3 If it is not possible to return these reports within the two-week period one of the Examiners should contact [Registry](#) to discuss the delay and agree a revised submission date.
- 13.4 MPhil, PhD and DrPH degrees are formally awarded only when the Examiners' report and the corrected thesis have both been received by the [Registry](#). A delay in submission of either will mean that the award will also be delayed. It is therefore essential that Examiners' reports are submitted in a timely fashion.
- 13.5 Where corrections are required, the student will send the corrected thesis direct to the examiners for review (copied to the [Assessments](#) team for information). We ask that examiners review the corrected thesis **within one month for minor corrections, or within two months for major corrections**. If a delay is likely, please contact the Assessments team to agree a revised date for completion of the review.

#### **14. RE-EXAMINATION OF STUDENTS**

- 14.1 It is expected that the original Examiners will examine the student on re-entry for their research degree. When re-examining the Examiners should have access to the report they made on the first examination, copies of which can be provided by the [Assessments](#) team in the [Registry](#). Examiners have discretion on whether to hold an oral examination on a revised and resubmitted thesis/DrPH portfolio, but this decision should be based on what was previously agreed in their joint report.
- 14.2 If the original examiner(s) is not available for the re-examination, the appointment of new examiner(s) will be managed by the Head of Doctoral College and the relevant Faculty Research Degree Director.
- 14.3 Once the revised thesis portfolio is received by the Examiners, the Supervisor is required to contact them and if necessary, arrange an oral examination in accordance with normal School procedures.
- 14.4 Apart from the possibility of not holding an oral examination, the re-entry examination is subject to the same rules and procedures as the original examination. All decisions, as listed above, are available to Examiners. However, Examiners are advised to be cautious when considering the recommendation of a further 18-month correction period.

## **AWARD NOTIFICATION**

### **15. AWARD NOTIFICATION PROCESS**

- 15.1 If the Examiners reach a unanimous decision and there are no unresolved anomalies, the decision will normally be conveyed to the student without prior reference to a committee. No official notification of the result will be issued to the student until the Examiners' reports have been received and processed.
- 15.2 A copy of the [Examiners' Report Form](#) and the Examiners' joint report is routinely sent to the student when they are informed of their official result by the Head of Registry – Student Records & Assessments. The student does not normally see the Examiners' preliminary reports but may do so if the Examiners wish them to be shared. Additionally, these reports will be provided to the student in the event of an appeal against the decision of the Examiners.

## **STUDENT APPEALS**

### **16. APPEALS AGAINST DECISIONS OF BOARDS OF EXAMINERS**

- 16.1 Appeals against decisions of Boards of Examiners must be made in the format and within the timeframe prescribed in the [Academic Appeals Procedure](#).
- 16.2 Any problems arising during their programme in terms of supervision or should be dealt with through the [Student Complaints Procedure](#).

*Last updated – June 2025*