



Guidance on the conduct of Masters by Research oral examinations

1 The oral examination

- a) An oral examination must be held if the examiners are considering that the student be permitted to re-present his/her dissertation in a revised for a second and final time within six months.
- b) It is a regulatory requirement that a student's viva is recorded and in some circumstances may also be conducted in the presence of an Independent Chair (i.e. all entry forms submitted after 1 January 2021). The examiners will be provided with the relevant practical guides.
- c) The lead supervisor is encouraged to attend the oral examination as an observer provided that the candidate has not indicated that his/her supervisor should not be present. The examiners will be informed if that is the case.
- d) No persons other than the examiners, the candidate, the Independent Chair (if applicable) and one supervisor may be present at an oral examination.
- e) The examiners should indicate in the appropriate place on the Final Report form the date of the oral examination and whether or not the supervisor and/or an Independent Chair were present.
- f) The purpose of the oral examination is to examine the candidate on the subject of the dissertation and, if the examiners see fit, on subjects relevant to this. The examiners should discuss prior to meeting the candidate the strategy they propose to adopt during the oral examination and, at its outset, outline this to the candidate.
- g) During the oral, the examiners should seek to establish whether all the requirements for a dissertation submitted for the Masters by Research have been met (as set out in the [Research Degree regulations](#)) and that the thesis is genuinely the work of the candidate.
- h) If the examiners have any doubts that the dissertation is genuinely the work of the candidate, they should contact the Doctoral School.
- i) There are no set requirements about the conduct of oral examinations, nor about their duration, but they should be conducted in such a way that the candidate has adequate opportunity, encouragement and time to explain his/her research and to defend the dissertation. It is recommended that, during a long oral examination, examiners should allow short breaks at appropriate points.
- j) The candidate has the choice for the oral examination to be held either face-to-face or via video conference. If it is held face-to-face, University Regulations require that the oral examination should take place at the Royal Holloway Egham campus, or at Bedford Square or Senate House in central London. If the oral examination is to be held via video conference, please refer to [Conducting vivas online – guide for examiners](#).
- k) The supervisor, if present, does not have the right to participate in the examination but may contribute if invited to do so by the examiners
- l) Where a candidate feels that his/her academic performance on the date of the oral examination may be substantially affected by unexpected medical or other personal circumstances, the student should inform the examiners of his/her situation no later than the start of the oral examination so that they can make a decision on whether or not to proceed. The examiners may require the student to submit evidence of his/her condition to the Doctoral School within seven days
- m) If the candidate becomes so unwell or distressed during the oral examination that he/she is unable to proceed, the examiners should, in consultation with the candidate and supervisor / Independent Chair (if

present), decide whether or not to continue the oral examination. If they do continue, they should note in their Final Joint Report that the candidate was unwell. If they decide not to continue, they should determine whether sufficient evidence has been provided to allow a decision to be taken or whether it will be necessary to hold the oral examination on another occasion.

- n) If the candidate makes comments to the examiners which put them under moral pressure (e.g. alluding to the consequences of failure for him/her), or offers any kind of incentive to the examiners to pass him/her, the examination should be terminated and a report made to the Head of the Academic Quality and Policy Office via the Doctoral School.
- o) In addition to examining the candidate orally, the examiners have the discretion to examine the candidate by means of written papers or practical examination. This provision is rarely invoked and examiners are asked to contact the Doctoral School if they wish to do so.
- p) At the conclusion of the oral examination, the candidate and the supervisor (if present) should withdraw and the examiners should initially confer together on the result in private. Care should be taken to ensure that the recording is stopped before this discussion takes place.
- q) The examiners have the discretion after the initial private discussion to consult the supervisor, irrespective of whether he/she was present at the oral, particularly if they have doubts relating to the appropriateness of the decision made.
- r) It is recognised that the examiners may wish to advise the candidate orally and informally of their decision at the conclusion of their deliberations following the oral. Examiners are advised to exercise particular care if they do this; it is important to make clear to the candidate that the result is not formal and final until the candidate has been notified by email by the Royal Holloway Doctoral School. This notification will be sent once the examiners have submitted their written reports and all other requirements have been satisfied (see section 7 below).

2 Equal Opportunities

All examinations of Royal Holloway are subject to Royal Holloway's [Equal Opportunities Policy](#). All candidates are subject to the same academic criteria and requirements.

3 Appeals Procedure

[Appeals](#) against the examiners' decision must be submitted in writing by the within 15 working days of the date on which the candidate was formally notified of the outcome of the examination.

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