



Doctoral Degree Examination Policy



Scope: All research programmes leading to an award of City St George's, University of London.

Senate Regulations: Senate Regulation 24.

Summary: This Policy outlines the general principles for a Viva Voce examination.

Date approved/re-approved: March 2026.

Date for review:

To be reviewed by the end of 2028/29 academic year, with allowance for minor updates, as required.

Effective from: 12th of March 2026.

Equality and Diversity Statement

Freedom of Speech

City St George's, University of London, regards freedom of speech and academic freedom to be fundamental to delivering its mission as the University of business, practice and the professions. Its values in this respect are set out in a code of practice on freedom of speech and academic freedom, which explains how the University will uphold, secure, and promote freedom of speech within the law. See: <https://www.citystgeorges.ac.uk/about/governance/policies/code-of-practice-on-freedom-of-speech> . Nothing in this policy should be interpreted in any way that would be inconsistent with the code of practice and – in the event of any inconsistency – the provisions of the code will prevail.

City St George's, University of London is committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion in all its activities, processes, and culture, under its Public Sector Equality Duties and the Equality Act 2010. This includes promoting equality and diversity for all, irrespective of any protected characteristic, working pattern, family circumstance, socio-economic background, political belief or other irrelevant distinction.

Where relevant to the policy, decision-making panels will ensure a reasonable gender balance (with at least one man and one woman) and will actively consider representation of other protected groups.

1. Scope and Purpose

The University is committed to ensuring that all doctoral researchers are provided with a robust examination experience and aims to ensure that staff and examiners involved in the process have all the information to establish a consistent and transparent examination.

The policy applies to all full-time and part-time doctoral researchers of the University, and its validated partner institutions and any staff and examiners involved in such processes.

2. General Principles

- a. The policy should be read alongside [Senate Regulation 23](#), Master's Degrees by Research, [Senate Regulation 24](#), Doctoral Degrees, [Senate Regulation 25](#), Submission Format and Binding of Theses, the [Application for Extension of Candidature policy \(Research Degrees\)](#) and the [Research Degree Framework](#).
- b. The Regulations also apply to partnership provisions¹ unless the two institutions have agreed upon and approved a different arrangement. Details will be set out in the partnership Memorandum of Agreement and student disclosure information.
- c. Applications concerned with any part of the examination process shall be approved by the Doctoral College Board of Studies via the online system upon the recommendation of the School Research Degrees Programme Committee or equivalent and the Senior Tutor for Research. However, the Tooting programmes will continue to use their local processes until the student systems are aligned. This exemption applies to all relevant sections of this policy.

3. Intention to Submit

Following the completion of the Intention to Submit form on the system, the doctoral researcher and their supervisors should discuss and select the most suitable examiners for the researcher and thesis examination.

- Doctoral researchers should give at least 3 to 6 months' notice before submitting their thesis for examination via the online system. This will allow examiners to be appointed and viva arrangements to be made in preparation for the actual submission.
- Once the Notification of Intention to Submit form is submitted on the online system², the doctoral researcher will need to confirm that the thesis is their original work and that the material has not already been submitted in fulfilment of the award of any other degree or qualification.
- If a doctoral researcher indicates readiness to submit their thesis without the support of their First Supervisor, the supervisor will need to provide in writing why they do not support the submission at the given time.

4. The role of the Chair and STRs for a Viva Voce examination

The purpose of a Chair of viva voce examination panels is to ensure that the operation of the assessment process is rigorous, fair, reliable and consistent.

Chairs of viva panels should, normally, be Category A supervisors.

- If this requirement cannot be met, a case may be made to the Chair of the Doctoral College Board of Studies for an exception. The staff member nominated, however, must:
 - a. be an experienced academic member of staff (more than five years in a substantive academic position and ideally more than 10), with experience of chairing panels/committees,
 - b. and, have experience of research supervision.

¹ Partnership provisions include the delivery of learning opportunities leading to an academic degree award or academic credit by University St. George's, University of London in collaboration with another partner institution.

- In all cases the Chair must be fully briefed, normally by the Senior Tutor for Research, about the role of the Chair including the regulations, procedures, policies and practices of research degree provision.

Overall, the Chair

- plays no role in the evaluation of the thesis, the viva voce examination, nor in determining the outcome of the assessment;
- is expected to possess good knowledge of the regulations, procedures, policies and practices of research degree provision;
- is not expected to possess specialist knowledge of the discipline.

Senior Tutors for Research (STR) are responsible for allocating Chairs within their areas of responsibility. The STR:

- may choose to fulfil the role of Chair for all viva voce examinations within their remit but are not obliged to do so. When the STR does not to act as Chair, they must ensure that an alternative is nominated;
- must ensure the Chair has sufficient experience of PhD supervision and examination to enable them to act with authority, in addition to fulfilling the criteria outlined above. The STR must also ensure that any nominee is fully briefed on the role of the Chair and what is expected of them;
- must ensure an alternative chairperson is nominated if they themselves are part of the supervisory team;
- the Chair will have access to the Preliminary reports issued by the examiners on the online system. These are available for information only and to assist the Chair in answering queries from the examiners about matters of process;
- the Chair is required to complete the Chair's checklist for all viva voce examinations on the online system and reflect on any good and bad practice. Comments on the checklist may collated, considered and disseminated where appropriate, including in cases of an appeal.

5. Examiner appointments for Viva Voce examination

Principles

For the avoidance of doubt, any individual holding a current academic or clinical employment contract with City St George's, University of London shall normally be classified as an internal examiner. Emeritus or honorary staff of City St George's shall also normally be considered internal examiners due to their continuing institutional affiliation.

Academic and research staff affiliated with other Higher Education Institutions, including other University of London member institutions, as well as emeritus or honorary academics from other institutions, shall be classified as external examiners.

- Examiners are appointed when the student has given 3 to 6 months' notice of their intention to submit.
- For student candidates usually one external and one internal examiner is appointed. However, it is possible to appoint two external examiners if the University does not have the appropriate expertise. Two external examiners are appointed for staff candidates to ensure that there is no conflict of interest.
- In exceptional circumstances, a third examiner may be appointed if the project is interdisciplinary and there is insufficient expertise between the two examiners to examine the breadth of the thesis. Any third examiner nominated must be an external examiner.
- No member of a doctoral researcher's supervisory team, past or present, may act as an examiner.
- All examiners are expected to have knowledge of the subject area under examination.

- Where one of the examiners is examining an MPhil/PhD thesis for the first time, they should be paired with an experienced examiner who should have participated in MPhil/PhD examinations.
- Examiners will be advised of the relevant regulations under which the researcher and thesis should be examined.

Examiners will normally be allocated 4 to 8 weeks to consider a thesis before the viva voce examination occurs although the amount of time may vary because the date of the viva is normally mutually agreed between all parties involved. Examiners are also required to:

- Prepare independent reports on the submission prior to the viva voce examination via the online system.
- Make a joint judgement as to whether the submission contains sufficient evidence of systematic study and, for the award of a doctoral degree, makes an original contribution either by the discovery of new facts or exercise of independent critical power. For the award of a Master's degree by research, this will translate into a record of original work, or the thesis demonstrates a critical exposition of existing knowledge.

External Examiners

External examiners should normally:

- Be a recognised international expert in the field of study;
- Hold a doctorate, or, in the case of examination of an MPhil thesis, hold at least a Master's degree by research;
- Have experience in examining a doctoral researcher.

In some instances, it may be appropriate to appoint external examiners from outside higher education, for example from the enterprise sector or other professions. The Doctoral College Board of Studies must be satisfied that such examiners are fully conversant with the requirements of the research degree and that the other examiner(s) have appropriate experience in examining research degrees.

Schools should not normally nominate an external examiner who has already been appointed by the School within the previous 12 months; any such requests should be forwarded to the Doctoral College for approval before the nomination is made.

Internal Examiners

The internal examiner is expected to be a subject expert and to uphold University's academic regulations, in conjunction with the Chair. Internal examiners may include Visiting Lecturers, Honorary or Emeritus staff or Research Fellows. Internal examiners should have a current employment contract with University or be recently retired.

Conflicts of Interest

Conflicts of interest (Col) apply when the examiner(s) have a professional or personal interest in the outcome of the examination, whether actual or perceived. Col should be avoided if possible but in all cases must be declared on the online system as part of the nominations process. **If there is a potential Col, supervisors are strongly advised to submit an email to the Chair of the Doctoral College Board of Studies with the rationale for why the declared Col would not affect the examination and the examination outcome.**

Examples include:

- The examiners have collaborated or co-authored research outputs with the candidate;
- The examiners own work forms a significant part of the thesis;
- The examiners have collaborated or co-authored with the supervisors or internal examiner on topics closely related to the research being examined (including joint grant holding);

- The student and the examiner have a work/employment relationship at or outside University;
- The external examiner has a formal relationship with the Department which may have brought them into contact with the candidate (e.g. honorary visiting professor);
- The supervisor, internal examiner or chair has recently examined or will shortly examine one of the external examiner's own doctoral researchers (within the last 12 months). When this is not possible to avoid due to small pool of experts in certain fields, a case should be made to the DC Board of Studies Chair;
- The external examiner is the member of a funding committee that relates to the project;
- There is a personal relationship (e.g. sexual, romantic and/or familial) between the examiner(s), supervisors, chair or doctoral researcher;
- Where the research project involves collaboration or funding with an external partner, that the external examiner is not independent of this relationship;
- The external examiner has a direct commercial interest in the outcomes of the research;
- The external examiner was either the supervisor of or supervised by one of the project supervisors (within the last 10 years);
- The external examiner has previously worked at the University (within the last 5 years);
- The internal examiner has retired from the University but has subsequently held a visiting lectureship (no more than 18 months beyond the date of retirement);
- The examiners have acted as a personal tutor, or dissertation supervisor to the candidate as part of a previous taught programme (this may be at a previous institution).

6. Submission

Initial Submission

- Doctoral researchers may submit their thesis at any time between the minimum and maximum periods of candidature permitted by the regulations.
- The submission must include a short abstract comprising no more than 400 words and formatted within each copy of the submission. The abstract shall provide an adequate and informative summary of the thesis and be in a form suitable for publication by the University.
- Where published papers are submitted, including paper manuscripts in preparation and under review, the submission shall include a paper which presents a reasoned argument in support of the published papers. This should place the work in its overall context, demonstrate the coherence and contemporary relevance of the work, describe the implications for future research and critically evaluate its strengths and weaknesses. Theses must be submitted in English. If the researcher is submitting published papers, they must provide copies in English of any papers published in another language. Work for which a degree or other qualification has been awarded may not be submitted.
- Where the doctoral researcher is submitting joint work, either as a thesis, published papers or performance records, it must be accompanied by [a Statement of co-authors of joint publications](#), incorporated into the thesis format, countersigned by the collaborator(s), which indicates clearly that a substantial part is original work on their part.
- Doctoral researchers may apply for an extension of candidature if they face extenuating circumstances preventing them from submitting the thesis within the maximum period of study.
- An electronic copy of the thesis should be submitted via the online system. In exceptional circumstances, for example when the file exceeds the maximum system capacity, the Course Officer should send an electronic copy to the examiners.
- A doctoral researcher who wishes to submit their thesis without the support of their First Supervisor should submit the completed portion of the thesis receipt form to the Senior Tutor for Research. The Senior Tutor for Research will obtain written confirmation from the First Supervisor of their advice not to submit.

7. Examination

- The doctoral researcher will be required to present themselves for an oral (viva voce) examination on the subject of their thesis or published papers unless, by permission of Senate and the recommendation of the examiners, they are exempt from the oral examination. Such an oral examination will typically be face-to-face but maybe conducted online.
- If the examiners determine in their preliminary reports that the thesis is not ready to proceed to examination, this will be recorded as a first submission, but the candidate will be permitted to resubmit their thesis in a revised form within 12 months. For the second submission the candidate will be required to present themselves for an oral examination.
- The candidate must satisfy the examiner in both the thesis and the oral examination. The examiners may fail them on the thesis, the oral examination, or both. The examiners may recommend re-examination only in the part that the candidate has failed.
- If the candidate is permitted to amend or resubmit their thesis or published papers, they must do so within the timeframe recommended by the examiners drawn from the examination outcomes listed below. Under exceptional circumstances, the examiners may recommend a longer period than that stipulated in this policy.
- The relevant School/Department or Centre and the Doctoral College Board of Studies shall be notified of the outcome of the examination through the online submission of the examiners' report.
- The candidate will normally be formally notified of the outcome within 14 days of the viva voce examination.
- If the doctoral researcher fails to make the amendments in the timeframe specified or the examiners are unable to confirm that the amendments are satisfactory, the procedure under 'Resubmission and Re-Examination of Thesis' below will apply.

Examination Outcomes

Thesis Amendments

A doctoral researcher may be required to carry out amendments before being awarded their degree. Examiners may recommend either minor, major, or editorial amendments.

Award a doctorate (with or without editorial amendments)

The doctoral researcher is awarded a research degree and no further amendments are required to the thesis. There may be minor typographical/grammatical changes to improve the final published thesis. These can be written into the joint report.

Minor amendments

Where the thesis broadly meets the criteria for the specified award, and the doctoral researcher fulfils all examination elements, the examiners will recommend awarding the degree subject to the completion of minor amendments.

Major amendments

Where the thesis meets some criteria but needs additional work to accomplish meeting all criteria, the examiners will recommend awarding the degree subject to the completion of major amendments. The examiners must also decide whether a further oral examination is needed during the amendment period.

No Award

Where the thesis does not meet the criteria for the specified award nor for a lower award (e.g. MPhil or MSc) then no award is made.

Timeframe of thesis amendments

Three to Six months

Examiners can recommend amendments if changes can be completed between 3 to 6 months. This is likely, but not exclusively, to apply to minor amendments.

Six to Twelve months

Examiners can recommend amendments if changes can be completed between 6 to 12 months. This is likely, but not exclusively, to apply to major amendments.

8. Resubmission and re-examination of thesis

The term 'resubmission' refers to instances where the doctoral researcher has been assessed and is required to amend and resubmit their thesis for further examination (with or without the need for an additional viva voce). Except in certain cases of appeal, re-examination will normally be undertaken by the original examiners.

Review of Thesis Amendments

After submission of an amended thesis, the examiners are required to submit their final decision. The examiners should normally assess a revised thesis within *four weeks* of resubmission. For the avoidance of doubt, examiners should consider the revised thesis against the requested amendments. This task may involve both examiners or be delegated to one examiner.

The examiners should complete the award process by choosing from the following options:

- Award PhD/Professional doctorate
- Award MPhil/MSc
- Further Revisions (maximum period of 4 weeks). Such revisions may include:
 - a. Typographical errors,
 - b. Minor amendments to text, references or other diagrams; or
 - c. More extensive corrections that do not require significant reworking of the intellectual content of the thesis.
- No Award

If a doctoral researcher is required to resubmit their thesis within 12 months, they will continue to have access to relevant University facilities and will be entitled to have minimal supervision during this period. Such supervision will amount to no more than one draft of the thesis being read and commented on by at least one member of your supervisory team.

Extension request

Doctoral researchers may request an extension to the period in which they are required to resubmit their thesis for further examination should extenuating circumstances arise where they cannot submit by deadline. Doctoral researchers should apply to the Senior Tutor for Research for an extension via the online system ahead of the date the thesis is due to be resubmitted and should provide any relevant information, including appropriate documentation, in support of their application. The Senior Tutor for Research should consult with the examiners when approving any extension.

Final submission

Doctoral researchers must submit an electronic copy of their thesis to the Library after examiners confirm the candidate has passed and they are satisfied with the thesis in its original form or following amendments. Doctoral researchers are also invited to email a copy of their thesis to the Institutional Repository (CRO) and submit a copy to EthOS the e-theses service run by the British Library. Students will need to sign a Thesis Deposit Agreement to confirm that they accept that the thesis will be submitted to the Institutional Repository and that the thesis will be made available through EthOS. In exceptional circumstances access may be restricted on commercial grounds, pending publication or patent application, or to maintain confidentiality. The period of restriction will not normally exceed three years but may be renewed subject to reapproval. All restrictions must be approved by the Library through the online system.

9. Word Count

A thesis should not exceed the word count below, which includes footnotes, tables and figures:

- MPhil/LLM/MMA/MRes/MA – 50,000 words
- PhD – 100,000 words (major thesis), or 20,000 words (prior publication)
- Prospective Publication – 40,000 to 80,000 words
- DPsych – 40,000 words plus 5,000-6,000 words on each case study and critical literature review.

The word count for a doctoral thesis does not include:

- supporting materials;
- appendices;
- bibliography.

Material that is submitted in appendices or other supplements should support the arguments made in the main body of the thesis, not extend them. The examiners may set aside information contained in appendices when determining whether the thesis should pass or not.

In exceptional cases, where the doctoral researcher may wish to submit a thesis for assessment that exceeds the maximum number of words, prior approval must be granted by the Doctoral College Board of Studies. If approval has not been given, the thesis will need to be amended and resubmitted.

Policy Title	
Doctoral Degree Examination Policy for Research Degrees	
Policy Enabling Owner and Department	Responsible for Implementation and Department
Doctoral College Board of Studies	Doctoral College Board of Studies School Research Degree Programme Committees
Approving Body	Date of Approval
Senate, upon recommendation from the Doctoral College Board of Studies	11 th of March 2026 9 th of July 2025 March 2025 January 2025 July 2023
Last Reviewed & Version	Review Due Date
March 2025 July 2023 January 2020 (some elements)	July 2028
Publication of Policy <i>(tick as appropriate)</i>	
For public access online (internet)? x	For staff access only (intranet)?
Website Link: https://www.citystgeorges.ac.uk/about/governance/policies/doctoral-researcher-policies/_nocache	Intranet Link:
Storage of Policy <i>(Previous versions of the policy must be stored in the drive by the author)</i>	
Drive Address: CUoL – Doctoral College Documents	
Queries about this policy should be referred to	
doctoralcollege@citystgeorges.ac.uk	

