

# GUIDANCE FOR EXAMINERS FOR SOAS RESEARCH DEGREES



Thank you for agreeing to act as an examiner for one of our students. This document provides a brief overview of the examination process for your reference.

## **Eligibility to Examine**

1. Examiners are asked to inform the Doctoral School Section, Registry if they have had any connections with the candidate or his/her supervisor/adviser which they consider would make it desirable for the School to reconsider the appropriateness of their appointment as one of the examiners. These connections could be either personal or professional. Of the latter, it is considered, for example, that an Examiner who has played a significant part in advising the candidate is inappropriate and particularly so where the collaboration has led to the publishing of papers by the candidate and the Examiner jointly. It is stressed that it is accepted that Examiners will usually be acquainted with the supervisor, and sometimes the candidate, and that this in itself is not a bar to acting as an Examiner. Any connections so notified will be considered by the relevant Associate Dean (Research).

## **Timetable for Examination**

2. In the interests of the candidate the School expects that the examination will be completed and that the examiners will have submitted their final joint report and other relevant documents to the School within three months of the despatch of the thesis to the examiners. If there is difficulty in complying with this request, please inform the Doctoral School Section, Registry (details in paragraph 48).

## **Preliminary Independent Reports**

3. Each examiner is asked to write an independent preliminary report on the thesis. It is expected that this will be written by each examiner after reading the thesis but before conferring with the co-examiner about it. Typically the preliminary report identifies particular areas which the examiner believes should be explored with the candidate during the viva examination, and, if possible, a tentative recommendation, based on an assessment of the thesis, for the result of the examination. Tentative recommendations should not be indicated to the candidate in advance of the viva, which is an integral component of the examination.

4. The examiners should exchange their preliminary reports with each other before conducting the viva examination. The preliminary reports must be submitted to the Doctoral School Section, Registry at the conclusion of the examination process.

5. If the examiners have any queries about the thesis which they wish to raise with the supervisor in advance of the viva examination, they are at liberty to do so. If the examiners have any queries about the School's requirements for the award of the PhD and about the regulations please contact the Doctoral School Section, Registry. Please note that all matters relating to the examination are confidential and examiners should not contact any third party, other than the supervisor as provided for in the regulations and this guidance. Otherwise all queries must be pursued through the Doctoral School Section, Registry.

6. The educational needs provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act require institutions to make reasonable adjustments for candidates with physical and special learning difficulties in their assessment. Examiners will be advised of any special arrangements for a candidate with their appointment letters. However, if examiners are informed directly by the supervisor or candidate of any disability, even in confidence, they should seek the advice of the Doctoral School Section, Registry, in order that they might be properly briefed.

## Viva Examination

7. A viva examination must be held other than in those circumstances for which provision is made in the regulations (i.e. on resubmission of a thesis following referral).

8. When the thesis is despatched to the examiners the candidate's supervisor<sup>1</sup> is asked to contact the examiners and the candidate to arrange and confirm a mutually convenient time and place to hold the viva examination. The supervisor should notify the Doctoral School Section, Registry of the details of when the viva will be held.

9. The School makes no special requirements about where the viva examination is held (other than a normal requirement that it be held in London). The viva is frequently held in the office of the supervisor or the internal examiner if that is convenient. The holding of an viva examination by telephone or by video-conferencing is not normally permitted, and any enquiries about this should be addressed in the first instance to the Doctoral School Section, Registry.

10. The supervisor can attend the viva 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.) Individual supervisors follow different practices in regard to their attendance at viva examinations, some making it their practice routinely to attend, others not attending.

11. The examiners should indicate in the appropriate place on the Outcome of Degree form the date of the viva examination and whether or not the supervisor was present.

12. No persons other than the appointed examiners, one supervisor and the candidate may be present at a viva examination.

13. The purpose of the viva examination is to examine the candidate on the subject of the thesis and, if the examiners see fit, on subjects relevant thereto. The examiners should discuss, prior to meeting the candidate, the strategy they propose to adopt during the viva examination and, at its outset, outline this to the candidate.

14. During the viva the examiners should seek to establish whether all the requirements for a thesis submitted for the PhD have been met (these are set out in the Regulations for the MPhil and PhD Degrees), and that the thesis is genuinely the work of the candidate.

15. If the examiners have any doubts that the thesis is genuinely the work of the candidate they should contact the Doctoral School Section, Registry.

16. There are no set requirements about the conduct of viva 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 thesis. It is recommended that, during a long viva examination, examiners should allow short break(s) at appropriate point(s).

17. 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.

18. If the candidate becomes so unwell or distressed during the viva examination as to be unable to proceed, the examiners should, after such consultation with the candidate and supervisor as is possible at that time, decide whether or not to continue the viva examination. If they do continue it, they should note in their final 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 viva examination on another occasion.

19. 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 Doctoral School Section, Registry.

---

<sup>1</sup> Or other person designated by the School to undertake this task.

20. At the conclusion of the viva examination the candidate and the supervisor (if present) should withdraw and the examiners should initially confer together on the result in private.

21. The examiners have discretion, after the initial private discussion, to consult the supervisor irrespective of whether he/she was present at the viva, particularly if they have doubts relating to the appropriate decision to be made.

22. It is recognised that the examiners may wish, particularly if their decision is that the candidate has passed, or will pass subject to making minor amendments to the thesis, to advise the candidate orally and informally of their decision at the conclusion of their deliberations following the viva. Examiners are advised to exercise particular care if they do this, and always to make clear to the candidate that the result is not formal and final until notified by letter from the School to the candidate after the examiners have submitted their written report and all other requirements have been satisfied.

### The Result of the Examination

23. The options open to the examiners in determining the result are set out in the Regulations for the MPhil and PhD degrees. These, in summary, are:

- (a) Pass.
- (b) Pass, subject to minor amendments to be completed and checked by one or both of the examiners within three months of the date of the viva.<sup>2</sup>
- (c) Not pass, but candidate be allowed to rewrite the thesis and resubmit it within 12 months ((from date of the letter from the School informing the candidate) for examination by the same examiners (a viva examination need not be held on re-entry).
- (d) Fail PhD, but either has met the requirements for the MPhil or might after revision of the thesis during either a three or 12 month period be able to meet the requirements for the MPhil.
- (e) Outright fail. No further entry to the PhD or MPhil degree will be allowed.

### Reporting to the School on the Examination

24. The examiners are required to complete and sign the Outcome of Examination form indicating which of the seven (for PhD or four for MPhil) available decisions they have made; **AND** they are required to write a joint report giving the grounds on which their decision is based. The joint report should be on a separate sheet and should include the following **at the beginning**:

- (a) candidate's name; and
- (b) thesis title; **and at the end**:
- (c) the signatures of each of the examiners; and
- (d) date.

25. The report should have regard to the requirements of a thesis for the PhD (see the Regulations for the MPhil and PhD Degrees). It should not cross-refer to the examiners' preliminary reports unless the examiners wish the candidate to be sent a copy of those preliminary reports.

26. If the examiners decide to refer the candidate to revise and resubmit the thesis for the PhD within 12 months, they should indicate in what ways the current thesis fails to satisfy the requirements for the PhD degree, and should indicate clearly, although not necessarily in detail, the revisions which they consider should be made.

27. If examiners who are referring a candidate to revise and resubmit the thesis in 12 months have agreed that it will definitely not be necessary to conduct a viva on the revised thesis, they may so indicate in their joint report. If

---

<sup>2</sup> The amendments should be set out clearly, normally in writing, and normally be provided to the candidate within two weeks of the viva examination. A copy should be sent to the Doctoral School Section, Registry. The Examiners (or one of their number nominated by them) may arrange directly with the candidate for the amendments to be made. The Examiners may, however, wish this to be arranged through the Doctoral School Section, Registry. In either case, the Examiners should complete the form "Outcome of SOAS Research Degree Examination Form" and return it with the required enclosures normally within two weeks of the viva to the Doctoral School Section, Registry.

they will definitely require a viva on the resubmitted thesis they should so indicate; and if they wish to reserve their position until they have read the revised thesis they should state this.

28. If the examiners decide that the criteria for the MPhil have been, or might be satisfied they should:

- (a) indicate the basis for their decision not to allow resubmission for the PhD; **and**
- (b) should indicate in a positive way how the requirements for a thesis for the MPhil (set out in the Regulations for the MPhil and PhD Degrees) are satisfied **or** (if they are recommending that the thesis be revised and resubmitted for examination for the MPhil degree,) how the criteria for the MPhil might be satisfied.

(The MPhil degree of this School is an award in its own right and may not be awarded unless the criteria for that degree are satisfied. It is not awarded as compensation for a failed PhD.)

29. If the examiners' decision is to fail the candidate outright, they should indicate the basis for their decision to reject all the other options open to them.

30. The examiners are asked to agree between themselves at the end of the viva examination the arrangements for drafting and finalising their joint report and for sending it, their preliminary reports, and their copies of the thesis to the Doctoral School Section, Registry.

31. It is important for the candidate that the examiners complete the Outcome of Examination form and send it, together with their preliminary reports and their joint report, to the Doctoral School Section, Registry as soon as possible after the completion of the viva examination.

**Reports must normally be submitted within two weeks of the viva examination and not later than three months from the date of dispatch of the thesis to the examiners.**

32. If the examiners have indicated on the Outcome of SOAS Research Degree Examination form that they require the candidate to make minor amendments, a further email will be sent by the Doctoral School Section, Registry (to the examiner/s named on the Outcome of SOAS Research Degree Examination form for confirmation that the criteria for the degree and the minor amendments have been completed satisfactorily. If, for any reason, it is not possible for the reports to be returned within two weeks of the viva examination, one of the examiners should contact the Doctoral School Section, Registry to discuss the problem.

33. Examiners have the right to make comments in confidence in a separate report to the Doctoral School Section, Registry (see the Regulations for the MPhil and PhD Degrees).

### **Notification to the Candidate**

34. No official notification of the result of the examination can be issued to the candidate or to any other authority until the reports have been received and processed and any anomalies resolved.

35. The requirements for award are not met until the candidate submits a properly bound final thesis and all other relevant documents.

36. A copy of the Outcome of SOAS Research Degree Examination form and the examiners' joint report is routinely sent to the candidate when he/she is officially informed by letter from the School of his/her result. The candidate does not normally see the examiners' preliminary reports, but may do so if the examiners so request and will do so in the event of his/her appealing against the examiners' decision.

37. PhD degrees are formally awarded on the last day of each month. In order for the degree to be awarded to the candidate in a particular month the examiners' reports and two copies of the corrected theses (one hard bound and one electronic copy on CD) must have been received by the Doctoral School Section, Registry by the last day of the month in question.

## **Examination of Re-entry Candidates**

37. It is expected that the original examiners will examine the candidate on re-entry whether to the PhD or to the MPhil.

38. In examining a re-entry candidate the examiners should have regard to the report they made on the first examination, copies of which can be made available to them.

39. Examiners have discretion on whether or not to hold a viva examination on a revised and resubmitted thesis, but will need to have regard to any statement they have made about this in their joint report on the original examination.

40. When the revised thesis is despatched to the examiners the supervisor is asked to contact the examiners to ask if a viva is required and, if so, to consult as necessary.

41. Students are permitted a maximum of one re-entry for examination. Apart from the possibility of not holding a viva examination, the re-entry examination for the PhD is subject to the same rules and procedures as the original examination. The outcome options available to examiners are set out in the Outcome of SOAS Research Degree Examination (Following Re-Entry).

## **If the Examiners are not in Agreement or Require Further Assistance**

42. The Examiners may request the appointment of a third examiner at any time if they consider it desirable and should always do so before they report formally that they are unable to arrive at agreement. In these circumstances they should contact the Doctoral School Section, Registry for advice in the first instance.

## **Examiners' Fees and Expenses**

43. A fee of £200 (gross) is paid to each examiner at the PhD (£150 for MPhil examinations) following the initial examination and subsequent re-entry examination after a referral. Payment can only be authorised on receipt of the Outcome of SOAS Research Degree Examination form, joint report as well as each examiner's individual report. The payment cannot be processed until the School receives documentation confirming examiners' eligibility to work in the UK and a completed Personnel and Payroll Form. The School is unable to accept unauthorized copies of eligibility documents. These documents must be verified by a SOAS member of staff.

44. Examiner payments may take around two calendar months to be processed and for each examiner's details added to the Payroll. Examiners are required to complete and submit the Personnel and Payroll Form which will be kept on record for two years from receipt. Examiners are responsible for informing the School of any changes to their details during this period.

45. Examiners external to the University of London and its Colleges may claim travel and other expenses of up to a maximum of £300 in accordance with the relevant schedules. SOAS will not normally pay for more than one night accommodation for attendance at the viva. Claims should be submitted to the Doctoral School Section, Registry at the conclusion of the examination with receipts. Expense claims will normally take around one calendar month to be processed and paid by our Finance Department. This payment will be by BACS transfer to the nominated bank account provided to us on the reverse of the expense claim form.

## **Equal Opportunities**

46. All examinations of the School are subject to the School's Equal Opportunities Policy, copies of which are available from the Doctoral School Section, Registry. All candidates are subject to the same academic criteria and requirements.

## **Appeals Procedure**

47. The School has a Procedure for the Consideration of Appeals by Candidates for Research Degrees, which is available on request from the Doctoral School Section, Registry.

**Doctoral School Section, Registry**

48. If you have any concerns or wish to seek advice at any stage in the examination process, please do not hesitate to contact us at the address below or by email to: [doctoralschool@soas.ac.uk](mailto:doctoralschool@soas.ac.uk). The Doctoral School Section, Registry is open to callers in person and by telephone +44 (0)20 7074 5102 between the hours of 10:00 and 16:00 Monday to Friday.