



## Guidance for oral examinations

### 1. General Information

This document has been put together for everyone involved in a Research Degree oral examination at King's College London.

In this document you will find:

- [Guidance for PGR Students](#)
- [Guidance for Supervisors](#)
- [Guidance for Facilitators](#)
- [Guidance for Examiners](#)

#### 1.1 Oral examination formats

King's offers the following oral examination formats:

- Face-to-face examination
- Fully remote examination
- Hybrid (partially remote) examination

All involved must agree to the examination format in advance of the examination taking place.

#### 1.2 Face-to-face examinations

Face-to-face examinations may resume from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2021. Please note it is the responsibility of the supervisor to ensure that the relevant risk assessments are carried out in accordance with faculty and building procedures before examiners are permitted onto campus.

Face-to-face oral examinations should be held on King's premises to safeguard all in attendance through the appropriate risk assessment that King's offers.

It has also been recommended by the university that anyone attending King's premises should wear a face mask and take an asymptomatic test before attending.

Understandably, there may be situations where this may not be possible and therefore if you wish to hold a face-to-face examination outside of King's premises then please contact the Research Degrees Examinations Team [researchdegrees@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:researchdegrees@kcl.ac.uk) in advance to seek approval.

### 1.3 Fully remote and hybrid examinations

For the fully remote and hybrid examination formats, IT services recommend using MS Teams which can be accessed internally and externally, although other platforms such as Zoom can also be used: <https://teams.microsoft.com/downloads>

Practise with the meeting software that will be used for the oral examination. Ensure a backup meeting software has been agreed in advance of the examination and that all in attendance are aware and have all required links.

Please note all involved will need to have access to a device with a camera and microphone. Examinations over telephone are not acceptable.

## 2. Guidance for PGR Students

### 2.1 Before the oral examination

After the Research Degrees Examinations Team have dispatched your thesis to your examiners, you should liaise with your supervisor to organise a date for your oral examination. The examination should take place within three months of the thesis dispatch.

The format of the examination should be agreed in advance by all those in attendance, including your examiners.

### 2.2 Face-to-face examinations

If you have opted for the face-to-face format your supervisor will be required to complete a risk assessment in accordance with the faculty and building procedures prior to the examination.

Face-to-face oral examinations should be held on King's premises to safeguard all in attendance through the appropriate risk assessment that King's offers.

It has also been recommended by the university that anyone attending King's premises should wear a face mask and take an asymptomatic test before attending.

Understandably, there may be situations where this may not be possible and therefore if you wish to hold a face-to-face examination outside of King's premises then please contact the Research Degrees Examinations Team [researchdegrees@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:researchdegrees@kcl.ac.uk) in advance to seek approval.

### 2.3 Fully remote and hybrid examinations – Good practice guidance

**Technology:** Practise with the meeting software that will be used for the oral examination. This is to check that your audio and video are set up right and you know how to display slides or any other material you may want to share.

**Be aware of your surroundings:** Adjust your work setup so that you face a window or are exposed to plenty of light. Make sure your background is professional and work appropriate!

#### During your remote or hybrid oral examination

**Speak up:** When you enter the oral examination announce yourself when you join. Introduce yourself and try not to interrupt someone mid-sentence. Do not be afraid to project your voice! Examiners will appreciate being able to hear you without having to strain their ears or turn their volume all the way up.

As in a face-to-face oral examination, it is not a problem to pause while considering an examiner's question; while waiting for them to respond or to ask the next question; or to ask them to repeat a question if you have not understood it.

**Mute your microphone when you are not talking:** Unless you live alone, your house may be noisy these days. Muting your microphone when you are not speaking gives other participants the ability to share their thoughts without distraction or frustration.

**Stay present:** Online meetings are particularly draining as they require greater concentration. You do not want to miss an important question.

**Leave the keyboard alone:** We recommend you use headphones and a microphone during the oral examination. However, if this is not possible and you are using your device's microphone make sure you are not typing. The sound of your typing may be distracting, not only to everyone else in the meeting (because your laptop's internal microphone is inches away from the keyboard), but it may also prevent you from devoting your full attention to the oral examination.

Of course, you might need to use your keyboard to find the section of your thesis that your examiners are referring to, just keep keyboard use to a minimum.

**Technology:** Flag up immediately if you are having problems hearing the examiners.

If part way through the oral examination the sound quality deteriorates, switch off the video, which may help! If possible, try to keep your webcam on, even if the examiners need to switch theirs off.

If the internet or the equipment stops working completely, we suggest attempting to restart the oral examination later, on the same day. A backup platform should also be agreed in advance if this were to occur. However, if the issues persist, the oral examination must be arranged for another day.

## 2.4 Facilitator

A facilitator is required for all fully remote and hybrid examinations.

For **fully remote examinations** the facilitator may be your supervisor if you consent to them being present. If you do not consent to this, or if your supervisor is unavailable on the day of your examination, it is your supervisor's responsibility to nominate an alternative member of King's academic staff to act as facilitator.

For **hybrid examinations** supervisors **are not** permitted to act as the facilitator therefore an alternative member of King's academic staff must be nominated.

Please see [here](#) for further information on the role of the facilitator and information for students within FoLSM

## 2.5 After your remote/hybrid oral examination - outcome

Much like for an in-person oral examination, your examiners may ask you to leave the meeting at the end of the oral examination for them to deliberate the outcome. They will inform you and the facilitator when to join again and may give you an indication what the outcome is.

For information about your examiners reports and what happens after the examination please see stage 7 onwards on the Research Degrees webpages [here](#)

### 3. Guidance for Supervisors

#### 3.1 Before the oral examination

Once the Research Degrees Examinations Team have dispatched your student's thesis it is your responsibility as the supervisor to make the oral examination arrangements. This includes the date, time, and the preferred format for the oral examination, the details of which should be confirmed to all parties at least two weeks prior to the date of the examination.

The examination should take place within three months of the thesis dispatch.

The supervisor is also required to complete the Oral Examination Consent form to inform the Research Degrees Examinations Team of the information, the form is available on the Research Degrees webpages and can be found [here](#)

#### 3.2 Face-to-face examinations

If the preferred option is for a face-to-face examination, as the supervisor you will be required to complete a risk assessment for each party in attendance, in accordance with the faculty and building procedures prior to the examination.

Face-to-face oral examinations should be held on King's premises to safeguard all in attendance through the appropriate risk assessment that King's offers.

It has also been recommended by the university that anyone attending King's premises should wear a face mask and take an asymptomatic test before attending.

Understandably, there may be situations where this may not be possible and therefore if you or your student wish to hold a face-to-face examination outside of King's premises then please contact the Research Degrees Examinations Team [researchdegrees@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:researchdegrees@kcl.ac.uk) in advance to seek approval.

#### 3.3 Fully remote and hybrid examinations

Online meetings are particularly draining as they require greater concentration. Please ensure regular breaks are scheduled and shared with all. The recommendation is to have 10-minute break every 1.5 hours.

Please ensure the oral examination is scheduled early enough to ensure it finishes on the same day.

If the internet or the equipment stops working completely, we suggest attempting to restart the oral examination later, on the same day. A backup platform should also be agreed in advance if this were to occur. However, if the issues persist, the oral examination must be arranged for another day.

The supervisor should be available for consultation by the student immediately following the examination to offer advice and support. If you cannot be available on the day of the oral examination, please ensure that another appropriate member of staff is nominated for this role and that the candidate knows who this is and how to contact them.

Please note: The format of the examination should be agreed in advance by all those in attendance.

### 3.4 Facilitator

A facilitator is required for all fully remote and hybrid examinations.

For **fully remote examinations** supervisors may act as facilitator if your student consents to you being present. If they do not consent to this, or if you are unavailable on the day of the examination, it is your responsibility as the supervisor to nominate an alternative member of King's academic staff to act as facilitator.

For **hybrid examinations** supervisors **are not** permitted to act as the facilitator therefore an alternative member of King's academic staff must be nominated.

Please see [here](#) for further information on the role of the facilitator and information for students within FoLSM

## 4. Guidance for Facilitators

A facilitator is required for all fully remote and hybrid examinations.

### 4.1 Before the oral examination

**Technology:** Practise with the meeting software that will be used for the oral examination. Ensure a backup meeting software has been agreed in advance of the examination and that all in attendance are aware and have all required links.

### 4.2 During the oral examination

The facilitator's role is to facilitate the smooth running of the oral examination, to ensure the examination process is duly followed and to step in if they feel due process is not being followed.

The facilitator is required to:

- greet the examiners
- carry out the initial introductions
- explain the general housekeeping rules
- explain what documentation needs to be completed
- ensure rest breaks will be offered (the recommendation is to take a 10-minute break every 1.5 hours).
- report back to the Research Degrees Examinations Team regarding any technical or other issues that may have arisen during the examination.

It is not the facilitator's role to lead or contribute to the examination, i.e., to ask or answer questions regarding the examination.

**4.2.1 Fully remote examinations** - supervisors are permitted to act as the facilitator providing their student consents to them being present<sup>1</sup>. Alternative King's academic members of staff should be nominated if a student does not give consent for their supervisor to be present, or if the supervisor is unavailable on the date of the examination.

For fully remote examinations the facilitator may choose—with the student's consent—to attend the full examination as a silent observer, or they may wish to leave after the initial introductions and return at the end. If leaving the examination, the facilitator should provide alternative contact details and remain available and 'on call' in case there are any issues, and they need to be contacted during the examination.

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<sup>1</sup> For students in FoLSM supervisors are not permitted to act as the facilitator and an alternative member of King's academic staff should be nominated.

**4.2.2 Hybrid examinations** – supervisors **are not** permitted to act as the facilitator therefore an alternative King’s academic member of staff should be nominated.

In hybrid examinations, the facilitator is required to be physically present for the entire duration of the examination for safeguarding.

**4.3 After the oral examination**

Much like for an in-person oral examination, examiners may ask the student and facilitator to leave the meeting at the end for them to deliberate the outcome. They will inform the student and facilitator when to join again to inform the student of the outcome.

## 5. Guidance for Examiners

Below you will find information about the oral examination and general examiner guidance. The Research Degrees webpages also has further information [here](#).

### 5.1 Before the oral examination

Once the Research Degrees Examinations Team have dispatched the student's thesis to the examiners, the student's supervisor should arrange a mutually convenient date and time to hold the oral examination.

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

**Please note** normally both examiners will be external to King's College London as per our regulations. Only in exceptional circumstances will an internal KCL member of staff be appointed to act as an examiner. All examiners, even those from within the University of London are considered external.

For the examination to run smoothly it is recommended that one examiner acts as Chair.

### 5.2 During the examination

During the oral examination the examiners should seek to establish whether all the requirements for a thesis submitted for the research degree have been met and that the thesis is genuinely the work of the student.

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 student has adequate opportunity, encouragement, and time to explain their research and to defend the thesis. Students should be offered short break(s) as appropriate.

If the student becomes unwell or distressed during the oral examination, the examiners should consult with the student and supervisor to decide whether or not to continue the oral examination. This should be noted in the final report. If the examination is stopped, examiners should determine whether sufficient evidence has been provided to allow a decision to be taken or whether it will be necessary to hold another oral examination.

In addition to examining the student orally, the examiners do have the discretion to examine the student by means of written papers or practical examination. This provision is rarely invoked, and examiners are asked to contact the Research Degrees Examinations Team if they wish to do so [researchdegrees@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:researchdegrees@kcl.ac.uk).

### 5.3 Face-to-face examinations

If the preference is for a face-to-face examination, the supervisor will be required to complete a risk assessment for all those in attendance in accordance with the faculty and building procedures prior to the examination.

Face-to-face oral examinations should be held on King's premises to safeguard all in attendance through the appropriate risk assessment that King's offers.

It has also been recommended by the university that anyone attending King's premises should wear a face mask and take an asymptomatic test before attending.

### 5.4 Fully remote and hybrid examinations

The examiners should discuss and agree the format of the oral examination and who will be leading.

**Technology:** Practise with the meeting software that will be used for the oral examination.

Ensure a backup platform has been agreed in advance of the examination and that all in attendance are aware.

### 5.5 During remote and hybrid examinations

Please mute your microphone when you are not talking.

Online meetings are particularly draining as they require greater concentration. The Supervisor will liaise with the examiners and the facilitator beforehand about scheduling regular breaks.

The student may need to use their laptop to access their thesis. Please allow additional time for the student to start answering your question, especially if you are specifically referring to a section in their thesis.

Flag up immediately if you are having problems hearing the student.

### 5.6 Facilitator

A facilitator is required for all fully remote and hybrid examinations. Please see [here](#) for further information on the role of the Facilitator.

## **5.7 After the oral examination**

The examiners should plan a procedure for the end of the oral examination that mirrors the normal procedure where the student leaves the room, while the examiners have a discussion, then returns where the examiners may provide the outcome.

The examiners have discretion, after the initial private discussion, to consult the supervisor irrespective of whether they were present at the examination, particularly if they have doubts relating to the appropriate decision to be made.

## **General examiner guidance**

### **5.8 Timetable for examination**

In the interests of the student, the university expects that the examination will be completed within three months of the examiners receiving the thesis. If there is difficulty in complying with this requirement, please inform the Research Degrees Examinations Team [researchdegrees@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:researchdegrees@kcl.ac.uk).

### **5.9 Thesis dispatch**

Under no circumstances should the student or supervisor email or post the examiners the thesis. The thesis should only be sent by the Research Degrees Examinations Team (RDET). If examiners have received the thesis by any other means, then please get in contact with the RDET immediately. Failure to inform the team may jeopardise the student's examination.

### **5.10 Reasonable examination adjustments**

The Disability Discrimination Act requires institutions to make reasonable adjustments for students with physical and special learning difficulties in their assessment. Examiners will be advised of any special arrangements for a student in advance of the examination by the RDET. Examiners informed directly by the supervisor or student of any disability, even in confidence, should contact the RDET.

### **5.11 Conduct of examination**

All matters relating to the examination will be treated as confidential. Examiners are not permitted to divulge the content of previously unpublished material in a student's thesis until any restriction on access to the thesis, granted by the university are removed.

## 5.12 Examiners reports

**Preliminary reports** - Each examiner must write an independent preliminary report, after reading the thesis but before conferring with the co-examiner. Typically, the preliminary report identifies areas which the examiner believes should be explored with the student during the oral examination.

If possible, this should include a tentative recommendation for the result of the examination, but this **must not** be communicated to the student or the supervisor prior to the examination.

The examiners should exchange their preliminary reports with each other before conducting the oral examination and email them to the RDET prior to the examination.

**Please note** that preliminary reports are shared with the student and supervisor following the ratification of the examination outcome.

**The joint report** - should detail the grounds on which the decision is based. It should be on a separate sheet and should include the student's name. The report should have regard to the criteria for thesis and award which can be found [here](#).

**Within three weeks** of the oral examination, examiners must confirm their decision to the RDET by submitting the decision form, the joint report and a list of amendments (if applicable) and both preliminary reports (if not already submitted earlier) to [researchdegrees@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:researchdegrees@kcl.ac.uk).

**Templates and Forms** - The decision form and templates for the preliminary reports, joint report and list of amendments will be emailed to the examiners when the thesis dispatch email is sent.

## 5.13 Examination outcome

The options open to the examiners in determining the results are set out in regulations, and can be found [here](#).

**Amendments** - if the examiners require the student to make minor or major amendments these should be set out clearly and may be given to the student directly, however, please also send a list of amendments to the Research Degrees Examinations Team along with the reports.

The examiners should indicate on the decision form who is responsible for checking the amendments, if this is left blank it will default to both the examiners

**Minor amendments** - can be checked and signed off by one or both examiners

**Major amendments** - should be checked and signed off by both examiners

**Supervisors** - are not permitted to check/sign off on any amendments

**Re-examination (12/18 months)** - If the examiners decide to refer the student to revise and re-present the thesis within 12/18 months for re-examination, the joint report should indicate in what ways the current thesis fails to satisfy the requirements for the research degree, and should indicate clearly, although not necessarily in detail, the revisions which they consider should be made.

The examiners should indicate on the examination pro-forma whether a further oral examination must be held.

If the examiners indicate on the decision form that a second oral examination should be held, then they cannot change this result at the point of the re-examination and the second oral examination must take place. Examiners cannot request a second oral examination following the re-examination of the thesis if this was not indicated on the original decision form.

It is expected that the original examiners will re-examine the student on their revised and re-presented thesis.

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

As this is a re-examination to confirm the degree, the examiners will examine the amended thesis, submit preliminary reports (when a second oral examination was required) and will provide a second joint examination report and decision form. The examiners will be asked to confirm whether the amended thesis now meets the criteria to award the degree.

**Failure to satisfy the examiners after minor or major amendments or after the re-examination of the thesis** – where a student fails to satisfy the examiners after minor or major amendments or after the re-examination of the thesis, the examiners will either:

- (i) recommend to the Research Degrees Exams Board that the student be recorded as an Academic Fail; or
- (ii) recommend the student for consideration for a related, lower degree (as set out above).

The examiners have the discretion to permit an additional calendar month for the student to make further minor amendments before making a final decision.

Examiners have the right to make comments in confidence in a separate report to the university. Such comments should not normally be concerned with the performance of the student but may cover, for example, matters which they wish to draw to the attention of the Research Degrees Exams Board or the Centre for Doctoral Studies.

**Lower Degree (MPhil)** - If the examiners decide that the criteria for the MPhil have been, or might be satisfied, they should:

- (i) indicate the basis for their decision not to allow revision and re-presentation for the PhD; and
- (ii) indicate in a positive way how the requirements for a thesis for the MPhil 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.

**Please note:** The MPhil degree 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.

**Fail** - If the examiners decide to fail the student outright, they should indicate the basis for their decision to reject all the other options open to them.

Any queries regarding the university's requirements for the award of the research degree should be directed to [researchdegrees@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:researchdegrees@kcl.ac.uk). Please note that all matters relating to the examination are confidential and examiners should not discuss the examination with a third party.

#### 5.14 Notifying the student

The Research Degrees Examinations Team will confirm the outcome of the oral examination via email to the student following ratification of the decision by the Chair of the Research Degrees Examination Board, which takes place at the end of each month.

Examiners are permitted to advise the student orally and informally of their decision. Examiners are advised to exercise particular care if they do this, and always to make clear to the student that the result is not formal and final until notified via email by the Research Degrees Examinations Team after the examiners have submitted their written report and all other requirements have been satisfied.

**Please note:** Students and supervisors are sent the decision for, examiners joint report, list of amendments (if applicable) and preliminary reports.

**Confirming amendments** – it is the responsibility of the examiner(s) checking the amendments to email the [researchdegrees@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:researchdegrees@kcl.ac.uk) to confirm whether the amendments made are satisfactory and if they approve them. **Please note** there are no forms to complete for this approval.

**Deadlines** – Awards and outcomes can only be ratified by the Research Degrees Examination Board once the Research Degrees Examinations Team are in receipt of the full set of reports, these include:

- Decision form
- Joint examiners report
- List of amendments (if applicable)
- Preliminary report (one from each examiner)

**Awards and outcomes are ratified at the end of each month, however the deadline to ensure these are considered is the 24<sup>th</sup> of each month.**

Any reports and approval of amendments received after the 24<sup>th</sup> of the month will be ratified at the end of the following month.

#### **5.15 Examiner's fees and expenses**

Information about how to claim examiner fees and expenses can be found on the Research Degrees webpages [here](#).