



# DOCTORAL DEGREE EXAMINATION POLICY

July 2023

## 1. Scope and Purpose

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

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

## 2. General Principles

- The policy should be read alongside [Senate Regulation 23](#), Masters 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](#).
- The Research Degree Framework and Regulations also apply to partnership provisions<sup>1</sup> 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.
- Applications concerned with any part of the examination process shall be approved by the City 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.

## 3. Equality & Diversity Statement

City, University of London is committed to promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion in all its activities, processes, and culture for our whole community, including staff, students and visitors.

The university will meet its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 in its policies and seek to eliminate discrimination on the basis of age, caring responsibilities, disability, gender identity, gender reassignment, marital status, nationality, pregnancy, race and ethnic origin, religion and belief, sex, sexual orientation and socio-economic background.

## 4. Examination process

### i) Transfer to Writing Up

#### Principles

- The transfer to writing up status occurs once the student has served the minimum period of candidature, the data collection/empirical work has been completed and when the student requires supervision on the thesis chapter and the final thesis draft. For most students, that usually takes place after 3 years of full-time studies and 6 years of part-time studies.
- The writing-up period should not normally exceed 12 months for full-time and 18 months for part-time students.

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<sup>1</sup> Partnership provisions include the delivery of learning opportunities leading to an academic degree award or academic credit by City in collaboration with another partner institution.

- Recommendation of transfer to writing-up is an academic judgement and will not be permitted for financial reasons;
- Doctoral candidates:
  - will not automatically be transferred to writing-up at the end of the maximum period of candidature<sup>2</sup>. The candidate will need to apply via the online system. If this action is not completed, it will need to be decided whether further supervision is required;
  - will receive supervision on reviewing draft copies of the thesis as a whole in preparation for imminent submission, provided that they are presented in a clear and consistent format and/or reviewing thesis amendments following examination;
  - may revert to full registration if they have not submitted within the usual maximum period permitted. However, if there are extenuating circumstances, candidates should submit an extension request in advance of the submission deadline;
  - will not be liable for full fees when their application is approved. However, they will be required to pay a nominal registration fee for the maximum permitted period until the thesis completion;
  - can submit materials and go directly to examination without transferring to writing-up. Nevertheless, candidates will be registered as writing-up status to ensure that do not pay full fees. Writing-up fees will not incur unless candidates are required to carry out amendments.
- International students should contact the International Student Advice Team ([visaadvice@city.ac.uk](mailto:visaadvice@city.ac.uk)) for any visa implications during this period.

## ii) Intention to Submit

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

- Doctoral candidates should give at least 3 to 6 months' notice before submitting their thesis for examination via the online system. This will allow for 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 system, the candidate 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 candidate 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.

## iii) 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.

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<sup>2</sup> Further information can be found on Senate Regulation 24:  
[https://www.city.ac.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/649016/Senate\\_Regulation\\_24\\_Doctoral\\_Programmes\\_2\\_0220110.pdf](https://www.city.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/649016/Senate_Regulation_24_Doctoral_Programmes_2_0220110.pdf)

### 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 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.

## **iv) Examiner appointments for Viva Voce examination**

### Principles

- 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 City 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 student'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 are 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 research student.

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 City 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 City Doctoral College for approval before the nomination is made.

### Internal Examiners

The internal examiner is expected to be a subject expert and to uphold City's academic regulations, in conjunction with the Chair. Internal examiners may include Visiting Lecturers, Honorary staff or Research Fellows. Internal examiners should have a current employment contract with City 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 City 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 City;
- 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 research students (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 CDC 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 candidate;
- 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 City, University of London (within the last 5 years);
- The internal examiner has retired from City 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).

#### **v) Submission / Resubmission of Thesis**

##### Initial Submission

Students may submit their thesis at any time between the minimum and maximum periods of candidature permitted by the regulations.

Students 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 student 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.

##### Thesis Amendments

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

### Minor amendments

Where the thesis broadly meets the criteria for the specified award, and the candidate 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.

### Editorial amendments

Where the thesis meets the criteria for the specified award, and there is only a need to clarify language, correct typos, or modify the document's formatting.

### 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.

### Extension request

Students 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. Students 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 seek the approval of the examiners before any extension is approved.

### Final submission

Students 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. Candidates are also invited to email a copy of their thesis to the University 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 University Institutional Repository and that the thesis will be made available through EThOS.

### **vi) 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)
- 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:

- word count;
- 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 you may wish to submit a thesis for assessment that exceeds the maximum number of words, prior approval must be granted by the City 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	
Policy Enabling Owner and Department	Responsible for Implementation and Department
City Doctoral College	School Committees Doctoral College Board of Studies
Approving Body	Date of Approval
Senate, upon recommendation from the Doctoral College Board of Studies	
Last Reviewed	Review Due Date
January 2020 (some elements)	July 2026
Publication of Policy ( <i>tick as appropriate</i> )	
For public access online (internet)? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	For staff access only (intranet)? <input type="checkbox"/>
Queries about this policy should be referred to	
Doctoral College, <a href="mailto:doctoralcollege@city.ac.uk">doctoralcollege@city.ac.uk</a>	

