

Examination Guide for Postgraduate Research Students



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1 Introduction

This document is here to help you learn everything you need to know about the Postgraduate Research examination process at Kent. It will guide you through the format of your thesis, the submission process, the viva and possible examination outcomes, how to restrict access to your thesis (embargo), and how to upload your thesis to the repository. This guide also offers practical recommendations to support you during the time between your thesis submission and your viva (oral examination), if you are required to undergo one.

This guide is intended to supplement various documents created by the University and provide you with the information required in order to present your thesis for examination.

The following resources are available to provide additional information:

- [Regulations for Research Courses of Study](#)
- [Code of Practice for Research Courses](#)
- [Kent Academic Repository \(KAR\) Instructions](#)
- [Restricting Access to your Thesis](#)

You may also find it helpful to look at the advice and information given to examiners regarding the examination of research degrees, as this will familiarise you with the different roles people play in the examination process and can help you with your viva preparation (if you are required to have one).

2 Before You Submit

Before you are due to submit your thesis for examination, you must complete a [Notice of Submission of Thesis form](#) and submit it to the Divisional PG Office at least two months in advance. The form starts the process of appointing your examiners and ensures that the University is ready for your submission. If you don't give full notice of your intention to submit, this may delay the examination of your thesis.

On the form, you will be asked to check that the form and spelling of your name corresponds with your University registration name, as this name will be used in recommendations for the award of your degree. You will also be asked to include the title of your thesis. The title you write here must match the title on your submitted thesis. Any discrepancy in the thesis title may cause delays in examining your thesis.

The form will need to be signed by your supervisor, so please make sure that you start the process early.

3 Presentation of Your Thesis

Once you have finished writing up your thesis, it's time to print it. The University requires your thesis to be presented and formatted in a certain way, so it's important you read through these requirements carefully before submitting it. If you are in doubt about the acceptability of the presentation of your thesis or have any other questions you should consult with your supervisor and your Divisional PG Office.

3.1 Paper

Use standard A4, good quality, white paper. You are asked to check each page to ensure that the print is clear.

3.2 Page layout

- You may print on both sides of the paper.
- Where double-sided printing is used, both the left hand and the right-hand margins must be at least 40mm (the binding edge of the page).
- Where single-sided printing is used only left-hand margin must be at least 40mm on the binding edge of the page, other margins must be at least 15mm.
- Double line spacing should be used for everything except quotations, footnotes, captions to plates, etc.
- The size of character used in the main text, including displayed material, must be at least 10pt (or 10 pitch or equivalent).

- No characters, for example subscripts and superscripts, may be smaller than 7pt (or 15 pitch or equivalent).
- Large maps and diagrams that exceed page size may not be suitable for printing or binding. Please provide them in a separate portfolio for examination purposes. Such a portfolio must have the name of the candidate, the name of the degree for which the thesis is submitted, the year of submission and the title of the thesis.
- Each copy of the thesis must be complete, containing all necessary maps, photographs, diagrams etc and be accompanied by its own portfolio (if appropriate).
- Published works or works submitted for publication may be produced to be included in the thesis as long as the reproduced works are of such standard as described above.

3.3 Practice as Research

For degrees which involve Practice as Research, the format and composition of the candidate's thesis will have been agreed in advance between the student, supervisory team and the Chair of the supervisory team. Although practice will be examined under conditions appropriate to the subject, it is essential that you also submit documentation of your practice which can form an accessible and lasting record. This should be included with soft and hard bound copies.

3.4 PhD by Published Works

Where a thesis is comprised exclusively of published papers or materials submitted for publication prior to the date of registration, this work should form a coherent description of a unified body of research. In such cases you will normally be required to provide a statement indicating the context of the research, its main aims and a discussion of the main results or conclusion. For copyright guidance, see section 3.7.

3.5 Collaborative/previous work

If your thesis is based in whole or in part on collaborative research, the extent of this

collaboration must be clearly indicated in the thesis. Any material which you have previously presented and which has been accepted for the award of an academic qualification at this University or elsewhere must be clearly identified in the thesis.

3.6 Length of theses

You should note that conciseness of presentation is an essential part of the "appropriate ability in the organisation and presentation" of your material, which you are required to demonstrate in accordance with the assessment criteria for research degrees outlined in the Regulations for Research Courses of Study. Therefore, you should not regard the maximum length specified below as the target length for your thesis. Additionally, the length of the thesis must not be greater than the specified maximum, unless it was approved by the appropriate Divisional Director of Graduate Studies and PG Student Experience. A thesis that exceeds the maximum length specified without permission will not be examined.

Humanities subject areas:

For the degree of PhD: not more than 100,000 words.

For candidates registered on practice-based courses: between 30,000 and 40,000 words.

For the degree of MPhil: not more than 60,000 words.

For the degree of MA: not more than 40,000 words.

Sciences subject areas:

For the degree of PhD: Normally between 160-225 pages but not more than 250 pages, including diagrams.

For the degree of MPhil: normally between 140 and 200 pages.

For the degree of MSc: normally between 130 and 150 pages.

Doctor of Medicine or Master of Surgery: normally between 140 and 200 pages.

Social Sciences subject areas:

The required word count will be set by each School.

The total number of pages or words referred to above may be taken as excluding bibliographies, references, appendices, quotations, footnotes and any supplementary material (tables of results etc), which it may be desirable to submit for ease of reference, but which do not form an essential part of the main text of the thesis.

3.7 Copyright

You are encouraged to consider any copyright implications as early as possible when writing your thesis, particularly regarding the use of material for which you don't own the copyright. Further advice is available on the library's thesis pages and by emailing copyright@kent.ac.uk.

3.8 Last checks

It is important that your thesis is presented for examination in a complete form. You are advised to check the following before submission:

- All chapters/sections are present and complete, correctly numbered and in the correct order.
- Tables of contents, etc. are present and correct.
- All figures and tables are present, inserted in the correct place, have an appropriate title and legend where necessary, are in the final form and appropriately numbered.
- The text has been carefully checked to remove typographical, spelling and grammatical errors. The bibliography is presented in an acceptable format; your supervisor should be able to advise you further.
- References are cited accurately, and every reference cited in the text is given in the bibliography and vice-versa. You can also look up [Reference Management Tools](#).
- All pages are present and correctly numbered and located.
- You have correctly set out subject specific aspects such as statistical analyses, formulae or quotations.

3.9 Editing and proofreading – advisory note

You may wish to engage the services of a proofreader or editor to assist you in completing a draft of your thesis. A thesis presented for examination in an incomplete or poor form could result in the examiners being unable to assess the academic work properly.

4 Thesis Submission

Important note: If you have any outstanding registration fees or debts, they must be paid before the thesis can be accepted for examination.

You must submit two identical copies of the bound thesis and an electronic copy of the thesis. The electronic copy of the thesis may be run through text matching software. It is really important that the electronic copy is identical to the hard copy version you submit.

If you are required to undergo a viva voce examination, you will have to bring a third bound copy with you (please see sections 5 and 6 for more information about an oral examination).

The three copies required must be bound in a 'perfect' binding with card covers. Your name, the name of the degree for which the thesis is submitted, and the title of the thesis have to be printed on the card cover. It should also show the total word count.

The binding must not be overfilled, so, if required, please split your thesis into two parts to avoid any risk of the binding becoming open.

Please note that if you are a member of staff and/or will be examined by three examiners, you will have to print three identical copies and retain a fourth copy for yourself to be brought to any oral examination.

The following sections (sections 5 and 6) provide guidance about the viva (oral examination). PhD, DClinSci, MClSci and MD/MSurg candidates must attend an oral examination unless specifically exempted from this requirement by the Dean of the Graduate and Researcher College. Candidates for Master by Research or Thesis

and Postgraduate Diploma by Research and Training must attend an oral examination if the examiners so require. Check your course specification to see if oral examination is required (for MA, MSc and PDip candidates).

If you are not required to undergo the oral examination, you may skip sections 5 and 6.



5 Preparations for the Viva

A viva is an oral examination and your opportunity to defend your thesis in front of your examiners

5.1 What to do before the viva?

Don't underestimate the accomplishment! Your focus for the past few years has been on undertaking your research and writing your thesis. Now that it's been submitted, take some time to congratulate yourself.

You may want to reflect on what it has taken to get to this point; you may not have maintained much contact with family and friends during the final weeks, your hobbies and interests may have taken a back seat, you may have not been eating and sleeping as well as you could. So, step back and take time for yourself; it's a massive achievement, so relax (a bit!).

Once you've had time to relax and regather your thoughts, it's time to start preparing for your viva.

5.1.1 Re-read your thesis

Now you have had an opportunity to reflect, it's a good idea to re-read your thesis ahead of the viva. If you find mistakes please don't worry, these can be corrected following the viva, during the corrections stage. But please do make a note of them in case they are discussed during the viva. Also consider

taking a fresh perspective on your work and pay particular attention to sections that you may have not substantiated fully enough or points that are contentious and might provoke debate. These are things that the examiners may question you about, and you should think through the responses that you might have.

5.1.2 Overview of your thesis

Make notes about each chapter and summarise details within each section. You could try creating a mind map of how all the chapters fit together and contribute to the overall argument or hypothesis.

You may also find the following steps useful for the preparation:

- Re-familiarise yourself with the literature you have referred to in your thesis. Summarise the key arguments of books and articles that you have cited.
- Keep abreast of research in your topic area that has been published since you submitted your thesis. New developments may have occurred that are relevant to your own research, and the examiner may ask you about them.
- Think about how your work fits into a wider field of knowledge and how it makes an informed and original contribution to research in the area.
- Have a clear idea of the strengths of your thesis. It is possible that you may not be asked about these directly and it is a sound strategy to try and weave these key strengths into the discussion. so the examiners are clear what they are by the end of the viva.

5.1.3 Research your examiners

Once you know the names of your examiners, you may find it helpful to consider how their research links with yours. Try and read some of their published work and consider how they may approach the findings of your research. However, do note that under no circumstances should you contact your examiners, or any Independent Observer, about your examination outside of the formal examination process.

5.1.4 Have a practice viva

Many candidates find this a particularly helpful way of preparing for the real thing. The practice can take different forms, from meeting with your supervisor or a peer, through to practicing questions on your own.

5.1.5 Attend a viva skills workshop

The Graduate and Researcher College offers workshops that cover aspects of preparing for your viva as part of the Researcher Development Programme. Please see the [Graduate and Researcher College pages](#) to check when sessions will run and to book a place. You should also access the Resources and Guidance on the Kent Graduate and Researcher College [Moodle site](#).

5.1.6 Final preparations

In the days leading up to the viva, it is recommended that you get prepared and think things through. Some of the suggestions below are quite small, but not having to think about them on the morning of the viva should help to focus on the important elements and remain relaxed.

- Think about the transport you'll take, or where you will park, to ensure you'll arrive in plenty of time.
- Plan what you're going to wear; you need to look smart, whilst also being comfortable and confident in your appearance.
- Plan what you'll take into the room with you and be organised with your items; you don't want to be hunting in the bottom of a bag for something that you can't find.
- Look at the location of the venue and the timings of the viva. If possible, visit the room where the viva will be held. Consider when will be the best time to eat.

Don't forget to take care of your wellbeing in the weeks leading up to the viva. Plan a calming activity to help you on the morning. Guidance on mindfulness can be found on Kent's [Mindfulness](#) website.



6 The Viva

The viva is a long-established part of the examination process for a research degree. The main focus of the assessment is on the written thesis/dissertation. However, the viva, which is the oral part of the assessment, is used to inform the examiners' final assessment decision. The viva gives the examiners the opportunity to explore any issues in detail and provide inspiring advice for your future research career. Examiners may have a strong sense of the outcome from reading the thesis, but the viva gives you an opportunity to defend your work, as well as to validate the thesis and demonstrate your skills in participating in academic discussion with research colleagues.

6.1 Purpose of the viva

The viva is an important stage in the research degree process, and for most it is the final hurdle before being awarded a degree. Despite its importance there is no definitive script outlining what will occur during the exam, how it will be structured and which questions the examiners will ask. Moreover, the advice offered by different universities and various handbooks can vary widely. Talking to other candidates about their viva experiences can also leave you with a confusing array of differing perspectives. On the other hand, many candidates find the process very enjoyable and report having relished the chance to demonstrate the knowledge they have acquired over three years of researching and writing. For the vast majority of candidates the viva is a positive experience and a valuable chance to discuss their work with friendly, interested examiners.

Important: you should take a copy of your thesis into your viva.

You can annotate your copy of your thesis or mark sections with sticky notes so that you can find them quickly if needed. However, do not waste time in the exam desperately trying to find sections of your thesis that you want to refer to. Trust that you have most of the information you need in your head. Examiners will use page numbers to refer you directly to the point they wish to discuss.

6.2 Viva arrangements

Your School or Division is responsible for nominating two examiners, one internal and one external, who are approved by the Divisional Director of Graduate Studies and PG Student Experience and the Dean of the Graduate and Researcher College. Many supervisors discuss possibilities with their students before making a final decision.

Your School/Division will arrange the exam, usually in conjunction with your supervisor and the internal examiner. You'll then be contacted to confirm the arrangements for the examination of the thesis, including date and time of the viva. The viva should be held within three months after the submission of the thesis, unless exceptional circumstances prevent it from happening. In the case of a staff candidate, the School/Division must nominate two external examiners and one internal examiner.

With your permission, your supervisor can attend the viva, as a silent observer.

6.3 Duration

The length of a viva will vary, but usually it's approximately 1.5-3 hours. If the viva takes longer this does not necessarily mean that there are problems with the thesis; it can mean that the discussion is going well and the examiners are enjoying finding out about your research. Your examiners should set out a plan for the viva, ensuring that you are able to take a break if you need one and that there are refreshments available.

6.4 Discussion between examiners

Once you have submitted your thesis and the examiners have been appointed, copies of

the thesis and examination paperwork are sent to the examiners by the Divisional PG Office.

The examiners must not contact each other to discuss their assessment of your thesis, nor engage in discussion with you ahead of the viva, except for when making logistical arrangements. On the day of the viva and before seeing you, the examiners will have a pre-viva meeting at which they discuss their initial assessment and agree the approach to the viva, including the areas of questioning.

6.5 Questions asked

Remember, no one is perfect. There will be strengths and weaknesses to your research and your examiners will want to explore these in more detail.

It is difficult to predict exactly the kinds of question that will be asked. These will depend on the nature of your thesis, and the examiners' approaches.

Here are some basic questions that may crop up in some form:

- Why did you undertake your research?
- What key questions does your research try to answer?
- How did you go about selecting and designing your particular research methodology? What were the results or outcomes of your research?
- How do these results contribute to or advance the field of research you are working in?
- What are the implications of your findings?
- What might you have done differently if you could go back and do it again?
- What further questions or areas of research have emerged in the process of completing your thesis?
- Where do you see this kind of research moving in the future? What are the gaps/openings that require further explorations?

The examiners will be asking questions to provide clarification and seek explanation and

elaboration where appropriate. Please remember that each examiner has a different style, and some questions may appear quite direct and challenging. In this situation, it's important to stay relaxed and take your time to give a thoughtful response.

If the examiner criticises your thesis, or points out a problem in your work that you were not aware of:

- Don't panic. It is common for examiners to challenge good candidates to see how they react under pressure and to test the limits of their knowledge in the area.
- If you feel you have a valid point to make, justify your ideas and conclusions. Be assertive yet courteous when defending your arguments.
- If the examiners have identified a genuine weakness concede the point gracefully. Do not become argumentative or allow the discussion to become heated.
- It is not a problem to recognise the limitations of your thesis, but it is important to explain why, despite these limitations, you have chosen your approach and how what you have done offers a significant contribution to the field.

If you are asked a question that you don't understand, feel free to ask for clarification.

6.6 Reaching a decision

Once the viva has finished, you'll be asked to leave the room, whilst the examiners reach a conclusion about the recommended result. The result will be one of those listed in the [Academic Regulations for Research Courses of Study](#). You'll then be invited back into the room to be told the recommended result and the reasons for the decision. If corrections are required, you'll be sent a written list of corrections after the viva. Your examiners may give you back your thesis at the end of the viva, or alternatively they may use it whilst developing your list of corrections, and then request that the Divisional PG Office return the thesis to you.

Note that it is rare that a degree is awarded without the need for any corrections to the

thesis being specified by the examiners. It is common for the examiners to recommend that the degree be awarded after the candidate has made minor corrections. This is generally considered to be a very good result.

Following the viva, the examiners are required to write a post-viva report and send this to the Divisional PG Office. When successful, the proposed recommendation and examiners' reports will be considered with the pass list and approved by the Divisional Director of Graduate Studies and PG Student Experience and the Dean of the Graduate and Researcher College. Once this process has been completed, you will be notified of the decision formally and provided with information about the arrangements for graduation.

7 After Your Thesis Examination

What happens next will depend on the outcome of your thesis examination and your viva, if you were required to undergo one.

7.1 Examination outcomes

The most common outcomes are listed below, as well as advice on what you should do next.

- **That the degree/diploma for which the candidate is registered be awarded.** All you need to do is upload your thesis to Kent Academic Repository (KAR). Details of how to do this can be found in the following section.
- **That the degree/diploma be awarded subject to certain minor corrections to the thesis being carried to the satisfaction of the Internal Examiner within three months of the official notification.** You will be asked to implement minor corrections within three months. These can include spelling/typing errors, textual errors; reordering of material; correction of literature citations (possibly inclusion of a few additional citations); correction of figures, tables and diagrams (possibly inclusion of one or two additional figures/tables/diagrams);

additional paragraphs for clarification or qualification.

- **That the degree/diploma be awarded subject to revisions to the thesis being carried out to the satisfaction of the Internal and External Examiner within six months of the official notification.**

This outcome requires you to amend your thesis within six months. It requires you to undertake substantial further work, but the corrected thesis does not require full re-examination. Such major corrections include more extensive editorial revisions, the addition of substantial new material, rewriting of substantial parts of the thesis, re-analysis of existing data, etc.

Shortly after the viva the Divisional PG Office will send you the list of these corrections, which your examiners will have created. Take some time to fully read the corrections and then discuss them with your supervisor. If there are any corrections that require further clarification, please contact your supervisor. Remember, your supervisor is available during your corrections period to support you if you require it.

Once you have made the required corrections/revisions you will have to submit your updated thesis to your Divisional PG Office. The Office will send it to the Internal Examiners (and External Examiner in case of six-month revisions). More details will be provided to you in the viva outcome letter. Once the corrections/revisions have been approved you will be notified by the Divisional PG Office to submit your thesis to KAR.

- **That the degree/diploma be not awarded at present, but that the candidate be permitted to resubmit the thesis in a revised form not later (except in cases of illness or other good cause) than twelve months.** This outcome means that, at present, you have not met the requirements for the award, and you've been permitted to undertake further substantive work on your thesis for submission for re-examination within the next 12 months.

The examiners will provide a statement describing the shortcomings of the thesis

and the changes required. These may include, amongst other things, editorial corrections and revisions, rewriting part, parts or the whole of the thesis and/or conducting further research or experimental work.

During this period it is really important that you work closely with your supervisor to undertake the work requested by the examiners and that you liaise with the internal examiner if anything is unclear.

Please note that a candidate should only be permitted one opportunity to resubmit, except in exceptional circumstances where mitigating circumstances may justify a second resubmission.

During this period you should have monthly supervision meetings with your supervisor, monitored via Progression Monitoring on the Student Data System. Details about your resubmission will be provided to you in the viva outcome letter.

- **That the degree/diploma be not awarded at present but that the candidate be permitted to take a further oral or written examination or both, on one further occasion, normally not later than six months after the decision.**
- **That the candidate be awarded a lower degree.** If you do not meet the requirements of the degree for which you're being examined, you may be awarded a lower award or be asked to make further corrections in order to be awarded a lower award. Further details regarding this can be found in the Academic Regulations for Research Courses of Study, section 8.6.
- **That the degree be not awarded.** In very rare circumstances, examiners may deem that the thesis hasn't met the requirements for the various examination outcomes outlined previously, and so recommend the outcome is 'fail'. In this instance, the examiners will provide a clear statement describing the reasons for the failure of your thesis.

7.2 If you are unhappy with the outcome of your examination (including the viva)

Examinations are conducted fairly and with due consideration to the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis. However, if you are discontent with the conduct of your viva examination you can make an appeal in accordance with the [Standing Orders Governing Research Appeals](#).

Please note that if you are considering appealing you should carefully consider the grounds on which an appeal can be made.

Details of appeals procedures can also be found in section 9 of the University's Regulations for Research Courses.

8 Final Steps

8.1 Electronic deposit of your thesis

Once you have successfully completed your research degree at the University of Kent you are required to deposit a digital copy of the thesis via Moodle for preservation, within three months of completion. The thesis will be preserved and publicly accessible in the Kent Academic Repository (KAR). Please note that the research degree will not be awarded until you have electronically deposited your thesis, therefore failure to deposit will prevent the award of the research degree.

You will need to make decisions about redaction, embargoes, sensitive material and Creative Commons licences before using the Thesis Deposit Point on Moodle. Please refer to the [library's thesis pages](#) for help with these decisions and for advice about the process.

8.2 Print deposit in the University library

In addition to the electronic copy of your thesis, you have the option of presenting a bound copy of the thesis to the University Library. The copy of the thesis, certified by the internal examiner, must be bound in a sewn binding of boards with cloth back and coloured dark red for MPhil and Master's theses, dark blue for PhD theses and MD/MSurg theses. The binding should be

coloured dark red for a postgraduate diploma by research and training.

Each volume must bear on its spine the name of the candidate (initials of forenames and full surname), the name of the degree for which the thesis is submitted and the year of submission, and on its front cover the title of the thesis. The lettering on the spine must be stamped in a downward direction or alternatively, where the width of the spine allows, in a horizontal direction. All lettering must be stamped in gold in the normal combination of upper- and lower-case type.

Once your deposit has been accepted, your Divisional PG Office will generate a pass list with your degree recommendation, which will be considered by the Divisional Director of Graduate Studies and PG Student Experience and the Dean of the Graduate and Researcher College. Once this process has been completed, you will be notified of the decision formally and provided with information about the arrangements for graduation.