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Research Degree Examinations



Registry – Postgraduate Research

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Introduction

This guide outlines and clarifies the process of examination for research degrees at the University of St Andrews (excluding MSc(Res) / MSt(Res)). It is aimed at members of examining committees, research degree students, and supervisors.

Key Contacts

Research degree examinations at the University are overseen by the Associate Provost Students with the assistance of the Postgraduate Research Team (PGR Team – Student Journey) in the University’s Academic Registry, and are conducted in line with the [Senate Postgraduate Research Resolutions and Regulations](#). Consequently, most correspondence regarding the examination process will be conducted with the PGR Team via registry-pgr@st-andrews.ac.uk, unless otherwise indicated. Any queries about research degree examinations and their associated processes should be directed to the Registry PGR Team in the first instance.

Nomination and Appointment of the Examination Committee

In advance of the submission of the thesis to Academic Registry, the supervisor should be considering the composition of the examining committee. Candidates should be given the opportunity to comment on the proposed examining committee but do not have a right of veto.

At least six weeks prior to the submission of the thesis, the supervisor should complete the nomination of examining committee via the Postgraduate Research tools on [MMS](#). This is then approved by either the Director of Postgraduate Research Studies or Head of School and then sent to the Associate Provost Students for final approval.

Under no circumstances may the candidate’s supervisor(s) be part of the examining committee.

Please note that an examination (Viva) date should only be agreed upon and set by the examining committee after receiving the approved thesis as there may be unforeseen delays before a thesis can be released to the committee.

Preparing for Submission or Resubmission of the Research Degree Thesis

Examination copies of the thesis should be submitted electronically through [Moodle](#).

All copies must contain the following:

- A title page with the title of the thesis, the name of the candidate, the name of the degree, and the date of submission.
- An abstract of the thesis of not more than 300 words (in the exceptional case of a thesis written in a foreign language a summary in English of between 2,000 and 3,000 words is required as well as the abstract).
- Declarations pages (including embargo requests) that are to be signed by both the candidate and the supervisor.
- Ethical approval letter (*if applicable*).

The title page and declarations should be compiled using the ‘Preparing for submission of my thesis’ or ‘Preparing for resubmission of my thesis’ task in MySaint.

Following submission of the thesis in Moodle, the PGR Team in Academic Registry will perform the appropriate checks, and let you know if there are any issues. The Associate Provost Students will then verify that the thesis has been submitted in line with Senate Regulations. At this point, the Associate Provost’s Report will be completed and the thesis will be released to the examining committee for examination.

Length of the Examination Process

The examination of the thesis for research degrees should take no longer than three months from the date the candidate submits their thesis to Academic Registry. As such it is expected that within this period:

- the thesis is read by the examiners,
- examiners' independent reports are written and submitted to Registry via MySaint,
- viva voce examination conducted if required,
- final recommendation of the examination committee made and the final report submitted to Registry via MySaint.

If the period of examination is expected to exceed three months, then the Convenor must seek permission from the Associate Provost Students.

Good Practice in Research – Ethics and Academic Integrity

Ethical approval

The examining committee is required to check whether theses involving 'activity with living human subjects or human tissues or human samples or activity which may have potential adverse consequences for human welfare and wellbeing' have ethical approval in the appendix of the thesis. If not, the examining committee must make it a requirement that such approval be obtained and bound in, before a thesis is finally accepted.

Academic Integrity

The University will deal with cases of suspected plagiarism, fraud, or other wilful contraventions of scholarly conventions appropriately, in accordance with the [Good Academic Practice](#) policy. If academic misconduct is suspected by an Examining Committee in the process of examining a thesis, the examination must be suspended, and the School's Academic Misconduct Officer (AMO) notified. The AMO will investigate and decide if there is a case to answer.

Submission of Independent Examination Reports

Once the Associate Provost Students has approved the (re)submitted thesis, the PGR Team will distribute the thesis and report templates to the examining committee. Following the receipt and reading of the thesis, the examiners will be required to complete their independent report. An external examiner should complete Report 2 and an internal examiner, Report 3. The report templates provide the criteria under which the thesis should be examined.

Examiners should note that, in order to preserve the independence of their individual reports, they should have no discussion concerning the thesis until after the submission of their reports. Any such discussion will render the examination procedure null and void, and a new examining committee will be appointed.

Examiners are required to submit their reports via MySaint **at least 5 working days** prior to the viva voce examination (if a viva is required). Once **all** examiners have submitted their reports, they will be able to view each other's reports in MySaint.

Viva Voce Examination – Organisation, Requirements, and Conduct

The purposes of a viva voce examination is to confirm the candidate's authorship of the thesis; to discuss points arising from the examiners' reading; to discuss with the candidate the wider context of the specific area of research; and to clarify areas of uncertainty or doubt.

Normally all doctoral examinations will proceed with a viva voce, unless there are extreme circumstances resulting in the candidate requiring this to be waived, for which the Associate Provost Students must be consulted. Masters examinations generally proceed without a viva voce, unless the examining committee believe a viva is required. In the case of a resubmitted thesis the requirement for a viva voce may be waived (if pass not in doubt).

If a viva voce is required, a date will be set by the Convenor as soon as possible by checking the availability of the examiners and candidate. Once an examination date has been agreed and confirmed between the candidate and examination committee, this should be communicated promptly to the PGR Team via MySaint. The viva voce can be held in-person, online, or in a hybrid format.

The viva examination typically lasts around 2-3 hours, although there are not specific rules about the length of the oral examination. If the viva lasts more than two hours the convenor should ensure adequate breaks are provided.

Final Report of the Examining Committee

Once the examiners have come to a unanimous decision on the outcome of the examination (generally following the viva if required), they will complete Report 4 and submit it to Academic Registry via MySaint within two weeks of the examination for Associate Provost Students approval.

The examiners may tell the candidate their recommendation at the time of the viva voce but the Convenor should notify the candidate that official notification of the result will not be communicated until the Associate Provost Students has approved the recommendation of the examining committee. The candidate will view Report 4 via MySaint regardless of the result.

Doctoral Examination Recommendations

For an **initial** doctoral examination, the following recommendations can be made by the committee:

- A that the thesis or portfolio be approved and the intended degree be awarded with no corrections; or
- B that the thesis or portfolio be approved and the intended degree be awarded, subject to the making of any purely typographical corrections or revisions; or
- C that the thesis or portfolio be approved and the intended degree awarded, subject to minor corrections to be completed within a period of three months; or
- D that the thesis or portfolio not be accepted in its present form but that the candidate be given the opportunity to revise and resubmit a corrected thesis within a period of 12 months; or
- E that the thesis or portfolio is not of sufficient merit for the intended degree, but the candidate may be given the opportunity to revise and resubmit the thesis within 12 months for a further examination for the award of MPhil. This recommendation may be offered at the same time as recommendation G as an alternative option; or
- F that the thesis or portfolio is not of sufficient merit for the intended degree, but that the candidate has met the requirements and should be offered an appropriate lower research masters degree. This may only be offered as an alternative to recommendation D; or
- G that the thesis or portfolio be rejected and no award made. This may only be offered as an alternative to recommendation E.

Candidates offered options F or G at examination must be given two weeks after being informed of the decision to choose which option to accept.

For a doctoral **resubmission** examination, the following recommendations can be made by the committee:

- A that the thesis or portfolio be approved and the intended degree awarded, subject to the making of any purely typographical corrections if required; or
- B that the thesis or portfolio be approved and the intended degree awarded, subject to minor corrections to be completed within a period of three months; or
- C that the thesis or portfolio is not of sufficient merit for the intended degree, but that the candidate has met the requirements and should be offered an appropriate lower award, where such as award exists; or
- D that the thesis or portfolio be rejected and no award made.

Masters Examination Recommendations

For an **initial** masters examination, the following recommendations can be made by the committee:

- A that the thesis be approved and the intended degree awarded with no corrections; or
- B that the thesis be approved and the intended degree awarded, subject to the making of any purely typographical corrections and revisions; or
- C that the thesis be approved and the intended degree awarded, subject to minor corrections to be completed within a period of three months; or
- D that the thesis not be accepted in its present form but that the candidate be given the opportunity to revise and resubmit a corrected thesis within a period of six months; or
- E that the thesis is not of sufficient merit for the intended degree, but that the candidate has met the requirements for and should be offered a MLitt, MSc or Postgraduate Diploma; or

Option D for MPhil and MFA

- F that the thesis is not of sufficient merit for the intended degree, but that the candidate has met the requirements for and should be offered a MLitt, MSc or Postgraduate Diploma; or

Option D for MPhil (by research)

- D that the thesis is not of sufficient merit for the intended degree, but that the candidate has met the requirements for and should be offered a MSc(Res) or MSt(Res); or
- E that the thesis be rejected and no award made.

For a masters **resubmission** examination, the following recommendations can be made by the committee:

- A that the thesis be approved and the intended degree awarded, subject to the making of any purely typographical corrections if required; or
- B that the thesis be approved and the intended degree awarded, subject to minor corrections to be completed within three months; or

Option C for MPhil and MFA

- C that the thesis is not of sufficient merit for the intended degree, but that the candidate has met the requirements and should be offered a MLitt, MSc or Postgraduate Diploma; or

Options C and D for MPhil (by research)

- C that the thesis is not of sufficient merit for the intended degree, but that the candidate has met the requirements and should be offered a MSc(Res) or MSt(Res); or

- D that the thesis be rejected and no award made.

Completion of Typographical/Minor Corrections

If a candidate is required to make typographical corrections, they have four weeks from the date of the receiving the examination outcome to submit their final copy of the thesis to the PGR Team in Academic Registry.

In the case of minor corrections, the candidate has three months from the date of intimation of the final examination outcome to complete these and submit them to the Convenor of the examining committee. These corrections will then be reviewed by the Convenor. If the corrections are:

- satisfactory, the Convenor confirms this to Academic Registry via MySaint.
- not satisfactory, the Convenor must consult with the other members of the examining committee, and consideration will be made as to whether a more comprehensive resubmission should be requested, or a further period of supervised study.

Resubmissions

In the case of a resubmission being recommended at the first examination, the candidate is given 12 months in the case of doctoral examinations, or 6 months in the case of masters examinations, to revise and resubmit the thesis in line with the examining committee's detailed comments on Report 4. The candidate must receive a detailed list of corrections and revisions deemed necessary by the examiners in writing from the Convenor of the committee. The candidate is expected to take these into account in any resubmission of the thesis.

The thesis is resubmitted according to the same procedure as the initial examination, and therefore the same guidelines should be followed as outlined in this guide. The candidate will be required to pay a resubmission fee prior to resubmission. A decision will then need to be made as to whether the candidate will be required to undertake a further viva voce examination. If the examining committee believe upon assessing the thesis that no further viva voce is required, then this can be waived in the case of a resubmission.

Appendix I - Administrative information for the Convenor

The Convenor is responsible for arranging the viva voce examination and ensuring that all processes and regulations are observed.

Additional arrangements may also be required by specific Schools. Please confirm local procedures with your School's Postgraduate Convenor. See also the [Policy for Assessment of Postgraduate Research Students](#).

Viva Voce Examination

Arrangements

Agree with the other examiners and the student whether the oral examination will take place in-person, online, or as a hybrid meeting. Practical arrangements for the examination should ensure that a room of suitable size is available for in-person or hybrid meetings, which will provide an appropriate environment for the examination taking into consideration factors such as privacy, noise, etc.

Special needs of either the candidate or the examiners should be considered. The supervisor is usually best placed to discuss any disability accommodations the student may require with the convenor of the examining committee. Students should ensure the supervisor is aware of any requirements in advance of viva arrangements if this has not been discussed already.

Communications with candidates about the arrangements for their oral examination should normally be made through supervisors; if you communicate directly with the candidate please ensure you copy emails or letters to the supervisor.

Confirm all arrangements for the oral examination with the external examiner(s). Ensure the external examiner(s) is/are briefed about expenses and, if appropriate, ensure that local accommodation arrangements are made on their behalf. (Please check with your School Office for local procedures.)

Preparing for the viva voce

In advance of the oral examination, ensure that you have copies of the following reports:

- Report 1 – Associate Provost Students's Report (*this will have been sent to you by the PGR Team by email*)
- Report 2 – External examiner(s) report
- Report 3 – Internal examiner(s) report
(*Reports 2 and 3 are accessed via MySaint once all examiners have uploaded their reports*)
- If the examination is for a resubmitted thesis, you should also have Report 4 from the initial examination (*this will have been sent to you by the PGR Team by email*)

Post viva voce

Ensure that Report 4 is completed, fully signed by **all** members of the examining committee, and submitted to Academic Registry via MySaint within two weeks. You should also ensure that copies of all reports are submitted to your Head of School and the Convenor of your School's Postgraduate Committee.

The external examiner will have been sent an [External Examiners Expenses and Fees Claim Form](#) with their copy of the thesis. Ensure that they have completed this and collect it from them so that their fee can be paid.

Viva Voce Outcome

There may be follow-up actions required depending on the examining committee's final recommendation:

- *Thesis approved subject to the making of any purely typographical corrections or revisions*

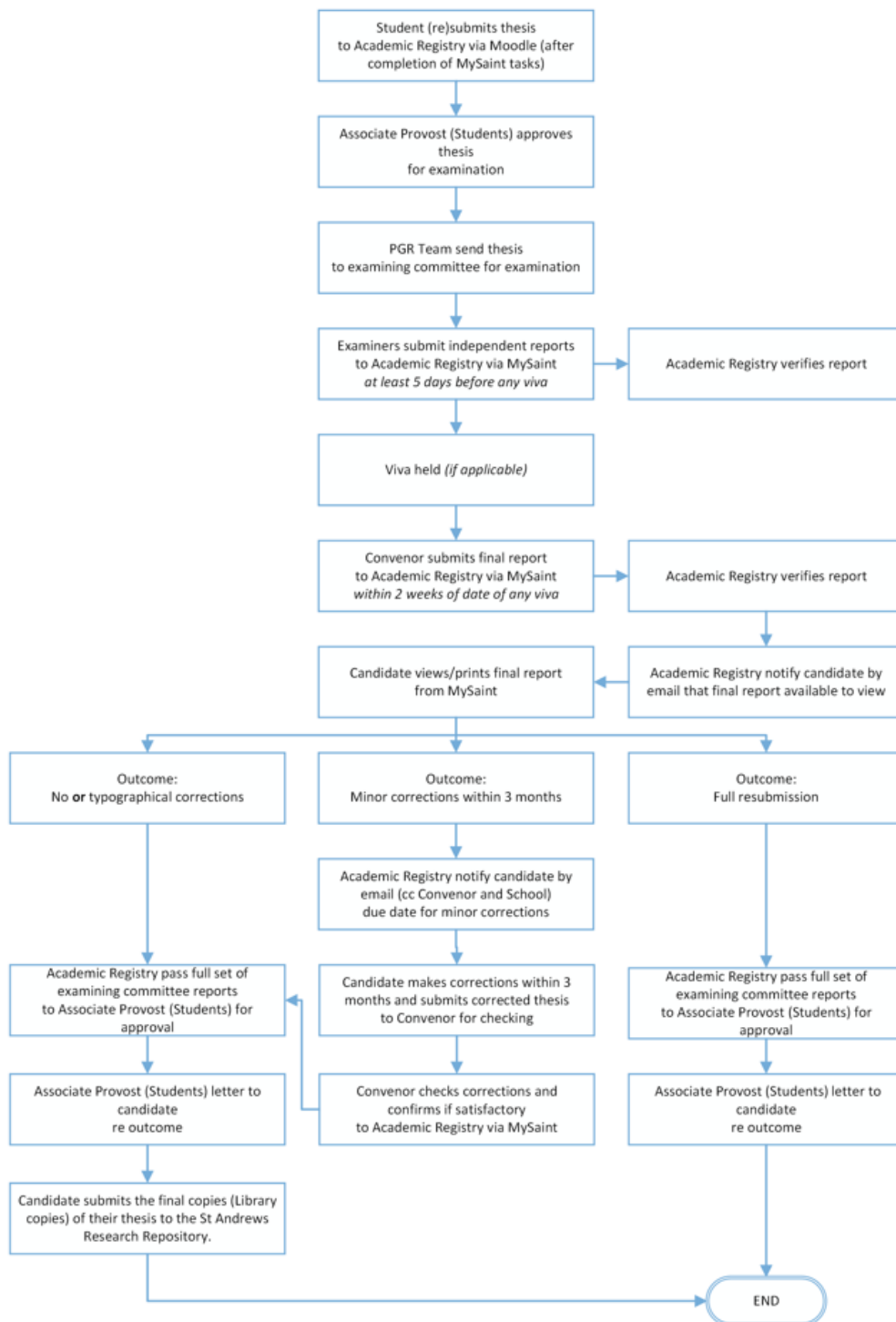
No further action is required by the Convenor as the candidate is responsible for ensuring they have completed the typographical corrections before submitting their final copies to the [St Andrews Research Repository](#).

- *Minor corrections to be completed within 3 months of intimation to the candidate*
 - Ensure that the candidate and supervisor are aware of the corrections required (these should be detailed on the Report 4 which the candidate will access via MySaint) and agree with the candidate the form in which you would like the corrections submitted to you for checking.
 - Monitor whether the corrections are made within three months from the date of intimation to the candidate (email correspondence will be sent from Academic Registry to the candidate and copied to the Convenor to ensure both are aware of the impending deadline).
 - Review the corrections – this should be completed within 4 weeks of you receiving the corrected thesis. If you are still not satisfied you should consult with other members of the examining committee and consider whether a more comprehensive resubmission should be requested, or a further period of supervised study.
 - Once you are satisfied that the corrections have been carried out satisfactorily, confirm this to Academic Registry by completing the 'Confirm completion of minor corrections' task via MySaint.

- *Full resubmission*
 - Ensure that the candidate and supervisor are aware of the corrections required.
 - Determine with the other members of the examining committee whether a further oral examination is required.
 - Once the thesis has been resubmitted, the examination is carried out the same as for an initial submission.

Appendix II – Thesis Examination Process Flowchart

Below is an illustration of the examination process



Thesis Examination Process Flowchart Description

From Submission to Examination

1. Student (re)submits thesis to Academic Registry via Moodle (after completion of MySaint tasks)
2. Associate Provost (Students) approves thesis for examination
3. PGR Team send thesis to examining committee for examination
4. Examiners submit independent reports to Academic Registry via MySaint at least 5 days before any viva
5. Academic Registry verifies report
6. Viva held (if applicable)
7. Convenor submits final report to Academic Registry via MySaint within 2 weeks of date of any viva
8. Academic Registry verifies report
9. Academic Registry notify candidate by email that final report available to view
10. Candidate view/prints final report from MySaint

Outcome (3 options)

If Outcome is: No corrections or typographical corrections

1. Academic Registry pass full set of examining committee reports to Associate Provost (Students) for approval
2. Associate Provost (Students) letter to candidate re outcome
3. Candidate submits the final copies (library copies) of their thesis to the St Andrews Research Repository
4. End

If Outcome is: Minor corrections within 3 months

1. Academic Registry notify candidate by email (cc Convenor and School) due date for minor corrections
2. Candidate makes minor corrections within 3 months and submits corrected thesis to Convenor for checking.
3. Convenor checks corrections and confirms if satisfactory to Academic Registry via MySaint.
4. Academic Registry pass full set of examining committee reports to Associate Provost (Students) for approval
5. Associate Provost (Students) letter to candidate re outcome
6. Candidate submits the final copies (library copies) of their thesis to the St Andrews Research Repository
7. End

If Outcome is: Full resubmission:

1. Academic Registry pass full set of examining committee reports to Associate Provost (Students) for approval
2. Associate Provost (Students) letter to candidate re outcome
3. End