



Research Project Registration Guidance

This guidance is primarily aimed at research project registration examination panels although PGRs may find it useful when preparing for the examination, in conjunction with [Seeking registration of the research project](#) (RO-GRA-04G). A summary of individual responsibilities is provided as an appendix.

As with most research degree matters, the process of seeking and obtaining project registration is fundamentally the same across all research degrees, although there are some differences according to the research degree on which the PGR is enrolled:

	MRes	Professional doctorate	PhD¹
Word limit	5,000	15,000	15,000
Written submission?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Viva examination?	No	Yes	Yes

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¹ Submission deadlines are based on the standard entry point.



Examination arrangements

The organisation of the examination is the responsibility of the Graduate School. The supervisory team will agree a date and time with the examiners that allows the examination to take place. In the case of vivas, the Graduate School will arrange a chair and arrange an appropriate location on campus.

Examination panel and format

The composition of the research project registration panel (examination panel) and format of the examination differ according to the research degree on which the PGR is enrolled:

- **MRes:** the submission is assessed by a panel comprising the PGR's supervisor and one other member of staff, both of whom must have supervised to completion at masters level (research or taught) or above.
 - The Director of Studies must provide the names of the examination team to the Graduate School within 4 weeks of the PGRs start date.¹
 - This is a paper-based assessment only. The Graduate School will arrange a date and time for the assessors to review the paperwork and this date will be communicated to the candidate.
- **PhD and professional doctorate:** the submission is assessed by a panel comprising an examining chair, one of the PGR's supervisors, and a member of staff unconnected to the project, but with relevant subject expertise. This paper-based assessment is followed by a viva examination.

Regardless of the research degree sought, all members of the examination panel must be research active, and all members other than the chair must have relevant subject knowledge to be able to assess the subject-specific quality of the proposal.² Neither the viva chair (where applicable) nor the examiner who is not part of the supervisory team must have any connection to the project.

The research project registration examiners need explicit approval of the Graduate School Board of Studies. Supervisors should note that examiners cannot be used on more than one viva per project.

Role of the viva chair (where applicable)

Unlike in progression or final vivas, the research project registration viva chair plays an active part in the academic examination so should read the submission accordingly.

¹ <http://eshare.edgehill.ac.uk/16215/>

² Viva chairs represent the Graduate School Board of Studies on the panel so are not required to have relevant subject knowledge. Chairs are appointed from an approved list curated by the Graduate School.



In addition to this examination role, the other main functions of the chair are to ensure that:

- the appropriate academic regulations are followed;
- the viva is conducted in a civil and appropriate manner (interrogative rather than interrogational);
- the event results in a decision – be it positive or negative – by assisting, advising and, where necessary (for example, to ensure consistency with the regulations), influencing the panel; and
- there is an independent written record of the event should it be required.³

Please note: all chairs must have completed viva training from the Graduate School within the past 3 years. If you have not been trained, please contact graduateschool@edgehill.ac.uk to book on prior to acting as a Chair.

Documentation

Project registration submissions are sent to the Graduate School and must include a:

- [submission cover sheet](#) (RO-GRA-01F);
- research project proposal (*see below*);
- research project management plan, including a Gantt chart detailing the proposed timeline for the project up to completion;
- [research data management](#) (RDM) plan, explaining how the research data will be stored and managed during the project, and preserved after completion to enable re-use by other researchers;
- **learning and skills needs analysis**, including the programme of related studies that the PGR has designed with the assistance of their supervisor(s). The paperwork is department specific. Please speak to your supervisor or research degree contact;
- a [confirmation of mandatory training attendance \(RO-GRA-22F\)](#) including, where necessary, details of suitable alternative activities undertaken when unable to attend the session (must be approved in advance by the Graduate School).

If the PGR did not meet the submission deadline, the submission is automatically considered a second submission, removing the option of 'revise and resubmit for re-examination' from the examiners. Panel chairs will normally be notified if this is the case although, if this is not communicated for any reason and the panel recommends 'revise and resubmit for re-examination', the Graduate School will overturn the recommendation to 'the project should not be registered', in line with the regulations, and the Graduate School Board of Studies will terminate the PGR's registration.

³ The chair's personal notes remain confidential to the chair unless there is an appeal (within ten working days) or complaint (within three months). In cases where the chair leaves the University within the complaint period, arrangements for securing access to, and the destruction of, the notes should be made between the chair and the Director of the Graduate School.

Aims of the examination

By the end of the examination, the examiners should be satisfied that the PGR meets the following requirements:

- Identify and articulate clear aims and research questions appropriate to the level of examination.
- Demonstrate a mastery and synthesis of relevant literature in the field, including capacity for advanced critical, theoretical and conceptual reflection
- Demonstrate detailed knowledge and understanding of appropriate research methodologies in designing the research, including an ability to critically reflect on methodological choices.
- Demonstrate sensitivity to, and understanding of, ethical and other values. Has planned for and identified a relevant, specific, Research Ethics Committee meeting date at which ethical approval will be sought
- Articulate and defend a scholarly argument through academic writing at the appropriate level for the relevant research degree (assessed via submission only).
- Demonstrate an advanced ability to defend their proposed research design.
 - [i] Demonstrate appropriate research project management skills, and critically reflect on those skills (must have included a research project management plan in the submission)
 - [ii] Demonstrate the ability to produce a research data management (RDM) plan that both respects subject confidentiality and ensures data is reusable where appropriate (must have included the plan in the submission)
- Demonstrate that they have:
 - completed a learning and skills needs analysis;
 - designed a programme of related studies that reflects the identified needs; and completed the programme of mandatory research training appropriate to the research degree, or have identified suitable equivalent training to undertake (which must be approved in advance by the Graduate School)

If the panel is satisfied that all these criteria have been met, there is no reason not to recommend registration of the project.

A member of the examination team must detail *how* the PGR meets each of these criteria in section 2 of the *Project registration examination report* (RO-GRA-02F). Without this information, Graduate School Board of Studies cannot consider the panel's recommendation.

Conduct of the viva (PhD & professional doctorate only)

The panel should meet in advance to plan the specific form of the viva. This will normally be immediately prior to the viva, but in exceptional circumstances need not be. The chair should aim to conclude the viva within 60 minutes (excluding any pre-meeting of the panel).

Before the viva

The chair and examiners should:

- note the range of possible outcomes from the viva, listed in the viva chair's report and below;
- remember that the viva is an integral part of the examination, so they must not tell the PGR their decision before the viva is completed – a decision and recommendation to the Graduate School Board of Studies can only follow the viva;
- set the agenda, ensuring any obstacles to success are discussed in the viva;
- agree how the panel will manage the detailed questioning;
- remember that the PGR can only be asked to make corrections (other than trivial ones) that have been raised in the viva and thereby discussed.

During the viva

The chair should begin the viva by explaining the examination process and the format of the viva:

- **Formal introductions**, and a brief explanation of the roles of viva chair and examiner, are helpful in setting the 'tone' as a formal examination).
- **The chair, PGR or examiners can ask for a break at any time.**
- **The PGR may be informed of the broad areas** the examiners wish to cover during the viva.
- **The PGR should provide a short verbal summary of the project.** In some cases it may be helpful for the candidate to use audio-visual aids such as PowerPoint for this summary (up to five minutes). Not all rooms can accommodate audio-visual equipment so it is the responsibility of the PGR to notify the relevant administrator dealing with the viva, of their requirement before final arrangements are confirmed.
- **The panel then leads the discussion of the proposed research** with a view to establishing whether the PGR has met the criteria outlined in 'Aims of the examination', above.
- **There should be a discussion of the PGR's learning and skills needs analysis** and their use of the Researcher Development Framework to plan a programme of related studies to address their needs.



- **The panel should discuss with the PGR the plans for ethical scrutiny and, where required, ethical approval** to ensure that the PGR is aware of their responsibilities with respect to this. The PGR should be made aware of the fact that, **if project registration is successful, it is conditional on appropriate ethical approval and they cannot undertake any primary research until such approval has been gained.**
- **The panel should consider with the PGR the likely format of the final submission and its length.** Different disciplines standardly produce theses and dissertations in different formats and of various lengths within the limits set out in the research degree regulations. The results of this discussion should be included in the designated area of the viva chair's report.
- **The PGR should be asked to leave the room while the panel discussion takes place.** This is after the panel has concluded its questioning and discussion of the research, or at such time that the chair of the panel regards there to be no further purpose served by continuing the period of questioning. The chair should ask the PGR to return when the panel has completed its deliberation.
- **If the panel is able to reach a decision as to its recommendation to the Graduate School Board of Studies, the chair should inform the PGR of the decision** with, where necessary, the subject-specialist members of the panel elaborating important subject-specific points.

The sole purpose of the examination of the project registration submission is to establish whether the PGR has met the criteria necessary for the panel to recommend that the project should be registered for a research degree.

A doctoral PGR need only meet the criteria through a *combination* of the written proposal and their performance during the viva. It is not necessary to meet all criteria in each part of the assessment.

The decision

The examiners must not introduce new issues during deliberation that were not raised during the viva.

The panel does not have the power to offer registration of the project directly to the PGR, but instead makes a recommendation to the Graduate School Board of Studies (via the examination report).

It is not always possible to reach a decision regarding the recommendation by the end of the viva. In cases where panels are unclear as to how the regulations should be understood, it is far better for them to delay the decision regarding the recommendation and seek advice from the Graduate School than to make a recommendation that subsequently proves to be inconsistent with the regulations.

There are a number of options available to the panel. The panel can recommend to the Graduate School Board of Studies that:



1. The project should be registered for the research degree sought;
2. The project should not be registered at the present time but the PGR should revise and resubmit the proposal for re-examination (with a viva for doctoral degrees);⁴
3. Following a re-examination, the submission is not of an appropriate standard so the project should not be registered (the PGR's enrolment will therefore be terminated by the Board); or
4. The PGR should be considered under the University's malpractice regulations.

Any recommendation of registration is subject to the PGR gaining appropriate ethical approval for the project.

In cases where the panel feels that the candidate has met the criteria but would benefit from the completion of additional tasks, it can recommend that such tasks should be completed without being a condition of registration using *section two* of this template ([Specifications of revisions: project registration \(RO-GRA-026F\)](#)). In such cases, the work would not be seen again by the whole panel, but would be considered by the supervisory team at the next appropriate supervisory meeting.

Resubmission

In cases where the panel decides that revision and resubmission is necessary, the Graduate School Board of Studies notes, rather than approves, the decision so the PGR need not wait to hear from the Board to begin their revisions. Following this recommendation, the PGR is permitted to make one submission of revised work, followed by a further project registration viva (for doctoral degrees).

The subject specialist members of the panel must provide written feedback to the PGR – via the Graduate School examinations inbox – regarding the changes required using the prepopulated specification provided ([Specifications of revisions: project registration \(RO-GRA-026F\)](#) **no later than five working days after the viva (or in the case of MRes, the submission)**); this should not specify actions to be taken but simply indicate general deficiencies, and is separate to the examination report.

Resubmission must be to the Graduate School examinations inbox within eight weeks for full-time PGRs or twelve weeks for part-time PGRs, from the date on which the PGR receives this written feedback.

Re-examination

Where possible, the same examination panel should reconvene to assess the resubmission (including for the viva, if for a doctoral degree project). A second chair's report will be required for the Graduate School Board of Studies.

It is important that the panel only considers deficiencies identified in the first examination, and does not introduce new issues or lines of questioning other than those that arise directly from the revisions. Determining whether an issue is a consequence of revisions is a matter of academic judgement.

The panel can, however, pursue any matters raised by answers given by the PGR in a second viva.

⁴Where the PGR's original submission was made after the submission deadline, the initial examination must be considered a second sitting. Under such circumstances, the option to offer revise and resubmit is not available.

If no new issues are raised by new material, revisions, or answers in a second viva, and the PGRs has addressed the matters raised following the first examination, there is no reason not to recommend registration of the project.

Paperwork and communication of the decision to the Graduate School

In addition to any written feedback, provided using the [specification of revisions: project registration documentation](#), that is given to the PGR by the examiners, the chair must complete a [project registration examination report \(RO-GRA-02F\)](#) for the Graduate School Board of Studies (submitted to the Secretary via the Graduate School Research Degree Administrators) within **five working days of the viva**.

While the *examiners'* post-viva feedback will be passed to the PGR, they will not normally receive the *viva chair's report* (which is a procedural report written for the Board rather than useful feedback for the PGR). However, there are circumstances in which one or both of these reports may be made available, uncensored, to the PGR or other appropriate body e.g. following a subject access request by the PGR, or if the Office of the Independent Adjudicator requests them.

Guidance updated 18 October 2022

Key Contacts	Contact emails
Graduate School	Graduateschoolexaminations@edgehill.ac.uk



Appendix: summary of responsibilities for the research project registration submission and examination

Viva responsibilities apply only to PhD or professional doctorate projects.

Role	Responsibilities
PGR	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Submit/resubmit to the admin by the deadline• Notify the admin of any audio-visual requirements for viva at an early stage
Graduate School Research Degree Administrator	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Arrange viva chair• Book room• Act as central contact point for examinations:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Receive the submission/resubmission and check it is complete○ Distribute the submission/resubmission○ Send confirmed viva details to panel and PGR○ Receive and pass examiners' feedback to PGR○ Receive and pass chair's report to Graduate School• Provide paper on all examinations to each Graduate School Board of Studies
Examination chair	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Act as non-specialist examiner (doctoral degrees only)• Complete examination chair's report• Submit examination report via admin within 5 working days
Supervisor	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Submit a proposed exam team to the Graduate School within 4 weeks of the PGRs start date³• Agree date and time for viva with PGR and other examiner• Act as subject specialist examiner• Provide details of the proposed supervisory team
All examiners	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Submit joint written feedback for PGR via admin within 5 working days (where applicable)• Liaise with examination chair to complete section 2 of examination chair's report

³ <http://eshare.edgehill.ac.uk/16215/>