

Doctoral and MPhil Viva Voce examinations - Guidelines for Examiners

1 Examination of Research Degrees

- 1.1 Except for the provisions of 1.2 below, the final submission for the degree of Master of Philosophy, Doctor of Education or Doctor of Philosophy will comprise a piece of scholarly writing with a full bibliography and/or reference list. The submission will not exceed 60,000 words for the degree of Master of Philosophy and the Professional Doctorate programme and 100,000 words for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The word counts include references in the text, footnotes and endnotes but exclude the bibliography or reference list and any appendices.
- 1.2 A student who has undertaken performance- or practice-based research may include in the final submission, creative work which has been generated as an integral part of the research process and that, together with the piece of scholarly writing, substantiates the argument(s) of the research project. The form that the final submission takes will be determined at the point of project confirmation, so that the piece of scholarly writing is a minimum of between 20,000 and 30,000 words in length and the scope of the submission as a whole meets the requirements for the award of Master of Philosophy, Doctor of Education or Doctor of Philosophy, as appropriate. The final submission must be accompanied, where appropriate, by an archival record (such as video or photographic record) of the candidate's practice. Such a record must be in a standard retrievable form.
- 1.3 An MPhil is awarded, following an approved programme of supervised research, to either:
 - (i) A student who, having critically investigated and evaluated an approved topic and demonstrated an understanding of research methods appropriate to the chosen field, has presented and defended a thesis by oral examination to the satisfaction of the examiners;
 - (ii) A student who, having produced published work, artefact or performance that is accompanied by a written commentary placing it within its academic context, has presented that material and defended the commentary by oral examination to the satisfaction of the examiners.
- 1.4 An EdD or PhD is awarded, following an approved programme of supervised research, to either:
 - (i) A student who, having critically investigated and evaluated an approved topic resulting in an independent and original contribution to knowledge and demonstrated an understanding of research methods appropriate to the chosen field, has presented and defended a thesis by oral examination to the satisfaction of the examiners;

(ii) A student who, having produced published work, artefact or performance that is accompanied by a written commentary placing it within its academic context resulting in an independent and original contribution to knowledge, has presented that material and defended the commentary by oral examination to the satisfaction of the examiners.

2 Examiners

- 2.1 Research students will normally be examined by an internal and external examiner and the examination will be chaired by an Independent Chair from the University. Where the candidate is a member of staff at the University both examiners will be external to the University.
- 2.2 The examiners will be able to make an independent assessment of the student's work and will not previously have played an active role in supporting his/her academic progress on the programme of study, nor have had any other involvement with the student or with members of the supervisory team within the last 3 years which might reasonably lead to an allegation of bias, or an allegation they could have a personal interest in the outcome of the examination.
- 2.3 Following his/her formal approval by the Research Degrees Committee, each examiner will be sent a letter of appointment and details of the University's rules, regulations and guidelines for the examination of Research Degrees.
- 2.4 An external examiner would not examine more than three candidates of the University in any five-year period without permission from the Research Degrees Committee.
- 2.5 An independent Chair will be recommended by the Doctoral Programme Lead (or equivalent) and approved, together with the examiners, by the Research Degrees Committee.

3. Examination arrangements

- 3.1 The examination for the MPhil, EdD and PhD will have two stages: firstly, preliminary assessment of the thesis or portfolio; and secondly its defence by oral or approved alternative examination.
- 3.2 Research Services will send a copy of the thesis or portfolio to each examiner, together with the examiner's preliminary report form, the University's Regulations and *UKCGE's* Conducting Vivas Online: A Guide for Institutions and Candidates where appropriate, and should ensure that the examiners are properly briefed as to their duties.
- 3.3 Each examiner must read and examine the thesis or portfolio and submit, on the appropriate form, an independent preliminary report to Research Services not less than five working days before the date of the viva examination.
- 3.4 In completing the preliminary report, each examiner should consider whether the

thesis or portfolio provisionally satisfies the requirements of the degree and, where possible, make an appropriate provisional Recommendation, subject to the outcome of the oral examination.

- 3.5 Research Services must ensure that all the examiners have completed and returned their preliminary reports to the University before the oral examination takes place. These reports will be shared with the examiners and independent Chair prior to the viva.
- 3.6 Following the viva voce examination, the independent Chair will submit a joint recommendation examination report from the internal and external examiners to Research Services, within 5 working days of the examination.

4. Conduct of the viva voce examination

- 4.1 The content of the thesis, the conduct of the examination of a student and matters related thereto shall be regarded as confidential to those taking part in the examination and to appropriate officers of the University until such time as the outcomes of the examination are agreed by the Research Degrees Committee.
- 4.2 The viva voce examination is concerned with the content of the thesis, ensuring that the work is the student's own, and any related matters which the examiners consider appropriate. Examiners will be expected to include in their judgement consideration as to whether and the extent to which a thesis is making a contribution to the literature and could thereby, easily lend itself to publication in academic journals. The student should expect to be questioned by the examiners on matters including: the focus of the research, the applied value/implications of the research, existing literature, the methodology used, the conduct of the research, the outcomes and conclusions.
- 4.3 The viva voce examination will be conducted in the presence of the examiners at St Mary's University in Twickenham. Subject to the approval of the Research Degrees Committee, the viva voce examination may take place via video-conference. Exceptionally, subject to the approval of the Research Degrees Committee, the examination may be arranged at another venue, provided all parties, including the student, agree.
- 4.4 One member of the supervisory team may be present at the viva voce examination. However, a candidate may request not to allow a member of their supervisory team to be present in the viva voce examination. Such requests should be made in writing directly to the Chair of the Research Degrees Committee. The member of the supervisory team must not participate in the examination and may only speak at the behest of the independent chair.
- 4.5 No persons other than the above shall be present at or otherwise take part in the viva voce examination.
- 4.6 Recording of the oral exam will not normally be permitted.

5. Examination Outcomes

- 5.1 Following the oral exam, the examiners should, where they agree, submit, on the appropriate form, via the independent Chair, a joint report and recommendation relating to the award of the degree, to Research Services.
- 5.2 Following the completion of the examination, the examiners may recommend one of the following outcomes:
- (i) That the degree be awarded. (They may be required to make minor typographical corrections to the thesis or portfolio, and/or to make other very minor non-substantive changes to the thesis prior to final submission of hard-bound copy);
 - (ii) That the degree be awarded, subject to specified minor revisions¹ being made to the thesis or portfolio to the satisfaction of the internal examiner within a period not exceeding three months;
 - (iii) That the degree be awarded subject to specified major revisions being made to the thesis or portfolio to the satisfaction of the examiners within six months;
 - (iv) That the degree not be awarded, but that the student be permitted to submit a revised thesis or portfolio within twelve months and be examined with or without a further viva voce examination;
 - (v) That, for those students registered for the PhD or EdD, that the degree not be awarded but that the degree of Master of Philosophy or Master of Education be awarded, if appropriate, after specified minor revisions have been made to the thesis or portfolio, and if the student submits the thesis for that degree within six months;
 - (vi) That for those students registered for the PhD or EdD, that degree not be awarded but the student be permitted to submit a revised thesis, for the degree of Master of Philosophy or Master of Education, by a specified date, (normally twelve months), with or without further research, and be examined with or without a further viva voce examination;
 - (vii) That the degree not be awarded and with no recommendation regarding a resubmission of the thesis.
- 5.3 In the event that the examiners' recommendation involves either permitting or requiring that the student makes minor or major specified corrections to the thesis prior to the award, the independent chair of the viva voce examination will notify Research Services of the corrections to be made and the timescale in which the corrections should be made in accordance with the Regulations for Research Degrees. Research Services will forward the corrections to the candidate.

¹ The phrase "minor revisions" shall be taken to include the correction of minor corrections, minor errors of fact, typography, grammar, style, syntax and/or layout of graphs/tables, additional sentences, tables, paragraphs or pages but not normally additional chapter(s). These revisions would enhance the readers' understanding of the author's argument but which does not alter the intellectual content and reasoning of the thesis.

- 5.4 If specified minor revisions are required to the thesis, the independent Chair will inform Research Services of the nature of the corrections in the form of a written list. Research Services will notify the candidate. Once corrections have been made, Research Services will forward to the internal examiner who will certify that any specified, minor revisions have been carried out satisfactorily. The recommendation of the examiners will be considered and approved by the Research Degrees Committee.
- 5.5 If specified major revisions are required to the thesis, the independent Chair will inform Research Services of the nature of the corrections in the form of a written list. Research Services will forward the corrections to the candidate.
- 5.6 Students will be required to submit a statement listing (with page number specified), the changes made against the changes required by the examiners.
- 5.7 Where there are major revisions, the independent Chair will ask the examiners to certify the completion of the major revisions within 90 days of receipt of the revised thesis. The recommendation of the examiners will be considered and approved by the Research Degrees Committee.

6. Re-submission of revised thesis for re-examination (4.2 (vi) above)

- 6.1 A student may submit a revised thesis once only, on the recommendation of the examiners and with the approval of the Research Degrees Committee.
- 6.2 A student will be informed in writing within a reasonable period after the viva voce of the reasons for the examiners' rejection of the original thesis, normally by being sent by the independent Chair a statement of requirements prepared by the examiners listing the principal aspects of the thesis which require improvement, a copy of which will be appended to the Examination Report Form.
- 6.3 The student is entitled to supervisory support in the form of monthly meetings during the resubmission period.
- 6.4 In the case of any re-submission of a revised thesis for re-examination, the student will be liable for additional fees.
- 6.5 Students will be required to complete an Intention to Submit form again but the original examination team will remain in place.
- 6.6 A revised thesis shall normally be examined by the original examiners but the Research Degrees Committee may appoint different examiners in exceptional cases, for example, due to illness.
- 6.7 Examiners may not recommend re-submission for a second time but may make one of the following recommendations, as appropriate, and should do so within 90 days of receipt of the revised thesis:

- (i) That the degree be awarded;
- (ii) That the degree be awarded, subject to specified, minor revisions² being made to the thesis or portfolio to the satisfaction of the internal examiner within a period not exceeding three months;
- (iii) That for those students registered for the degree of EdD, that the degree not be awarded but that the degree of Master of Education be awarded, if appropriate, after specified minor revisions have been made to the thesis or portfolio, and if the student submits the thesis for that degree within six months;
- (iv) That for those students registered for the degree of PhD, that the degree not be awarded but that the degree of Master of Philosophy be awarded, if appropriate, after specified minor revisions have been made to the thesis or portfolio, and if the student submits the thesis for that degree within six months;
- (v) That the degree not be awarded and the student will be withdrawn from the programme.

7. Disagreement between the examiners

- 7.1 In the case of disagreement between the examiners, the Chair should mediate to endeavour to help the examiners reach an agreed position. Where this is not possible the Chair will bring the issue to the attention of the Research Degrees Committee in the form of a report. The Research Degrees Committee will consider and decide on next options.

² "Minor revisions" are those which do not involve further supervision or any further original research. Such additions might include, for example, additional sentences, tables, paragraphs or pages but not normally additional chapters. They may additionally include specified minor corrections.