

## Guidance for Independent Chairs of Doctoral/MPhil Viva Voce Examinations

In accordance with the [Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes](#) (13.2.4), the independent Chair is from within the University, normally with some knowledge of the field, but independent of the research programme.

The role of the Chair is to clarify the [Regulations for Research Degree Programmes](#), where appropriate, and to ensure that the viva voce is conducted in a courteous and professional manner. The Chair must intervene if the examiners do not adhere to these regulations.

The conduct of the examination is the responsibility of the examiners, in consultation with the Chair of the viva voce. The only parties who may be involved in any discussion of the proposed result prior to the viva voce are: the internal and external examiners and, the Chair.

### RESPONSIBILITIES:

In accordance with the [Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes](#) -

Following informal contact by the Director of Studies with the examiners, the Chair formally confirms the date of the viva voce examination, with the candidate and the examiners.

The Chair is not an examiner and is not expected to question the student about the work being examined. It is not expected that the Chair should read a copy of the thesis or portfolio in preparation for the examination.

In the case of disagreement between the examiners, the Chair's role is to advise the examiners on the regulatory options. The Chair does not have an additional casting vote but should endeavour to help the examiners reach an agreed position.

The primary role of the Chair is to oversee the viva voce examination and ensure that:

- (i) the assessment process is rigorous, fair, reliable and consistent;
- (ii) the candidate has the opportunity to defend the thesis and the opportunity to respond to all questions posed by the examiners;
- (iii) the examiners' questioning is not unduly aggressive or confrontational or otherwise inappropriate and they should intervene, if required;
- (iv) the examiners adhere to the University's regulations and procedures and receive appropriate advice on these from the Chair, where required;
- (v) the examiners' preliminary reports are completed prior to the viva;
- (vi) the recommendations of the examiners are communicated to the candidate and the final joint report completed following the viva is sent to the Research Degrees Committee

- (vii) any actions resulting from the examination are clear and understood by all parties

### **Checklist for Independent Chairs**

#### **Preparation for the viva**

1. The Director of Studies is responsible for confirming the date and time of the viva with examiners, Chair, and the candidate. They are also responsible for confirming the mode of the viva examination, with all parties
2. The Chair is responsible for booking the room, or setting up the online invitations for all parties and, ensuring that Research Services are informed.

#### **Immediate preparation**

1. If the viva is online, the Chair should ensure that contact details (mobile or email), are exchanged between all parties in advance of the viva should there be a need to make contact either prior to, or during, the viva.
2. Arrive at viva location before time or, login, if online, in advance of the viva
3. Be aware of location of toilet facilities convenient to examination.
4. Make sure there is water available for examiners and candidate.

#### **Pre-viva meeting**

1. Explain the role and responsibilities of the Chair.
2. Ensure that examiners have familiarised themselves with the Regulations
3. Explain the ramifications of various outcomes of the viva:
  - Award subject to minor revisions (3 months) – internal\* examiner to sign off revisions
  - Award subject to major revisions (6 months) – both examiners to sign off revisions
  - No award. Re-submission required (12 months) with or without a second viva voce examination – both examiners to sign off revisionsSee Regulations 3.17 for further outcomes
4. Ensure that any procedural questions that the Examiners may have are discussed and resolved; this may include a discussion on how exactly the thesis will be examined (e.g. turn-taking by the Examiners, chapter-by-chapter analysis, etc).
5. Ascertain the examiners' overall assessment of the thesis.

#### **The viva**

1. Allow the candidate into viva. One supervisor can attend, unless the candidate objects (supervisor to sit behind candidate if in the same room; if online, the supervisor is to be off camera and mute).
2. Introduce the candidate to the examiners.
3. Explain the ramifications of various outcomes (see 3 above)
4. Remind all attendees to switch phones to silent.
5. Ensure that the environment is conducive to the examination, i.e. light, ventilation, noise.
6. Make sure the candidate is comfortable and has water.
7. Ensure that the candidate is being examined in a fair manner and intervenes if they judge that fairness to the candidate is at risk.
8. Offer the candidate a break, as appropriate.

#### **The decision making**

1. The Chair asks the candidate to vacate the examination.

2. Examiners make deliberations and agree their recommendation.
3. The Chair asks the candidate, and supervisor(s), to re-join the examination for the examiners' verbal recommendations.

### **Disagreement between the examiners**

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.

### **Completion of Examiners' Joint Report Form**

1. The Chair asks the examiners to complete the joint report form, sign and return to them within 5 working days of the examination.
2. The Chair forwards completed and signed examination report to Research Services
3. The Chair reminds the examiners of their responsibilities regarding corrections
  - a. Award subject to minor revisions (3 months) – internal\* examiner to sign off revisions
  - b. Award subject to major revisions (6 months) – both examiners to sign off revisions
  - c. No award. Re-submission required (12 months) with or without a second viva voce examination – both examiners to sign off revisions
 See Research Degree Regulations 3.17, for further outcomes

\*If no internal examiner, the Chair should request that one of the external examiners acts in this capacity

### **Online viva voce examinations**

The Chair's role is particularly important in online viva voce examinations –

1. Ensure the candidate is not disadvantaged and try to resolve any technical problems.
2. Personal chat features should be disabled – for Zoom hosts see <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/115004809306-Enabling-or-disabling-in-meeting-chat>
3. The examiners need to agree with the Chair how the viva will be conducted, e.g. how to intervene if a new question occurs to them
4. The Chair may stop, or pause, the viva at any point should they deem this necessary for technical reasons, or, because the candidate requires a break.
5. If communication is broken during the viva examination and cannot be re-established, the examination should be terminated and, either –
  - a. Reschedule the viva within one calendar month, or,
  - b. If communication was broken towards the end of the examination, the examiner can jointly agree that further examination would not alter their recommendation, and inform the candidate of their final joint recommendation. In making their decision, the examiners should take into consideration whether recommendations for revision include aspects of the thesis not discussed prior the breakdown in communication.
6. Having an online viva is not, in itself, grounds for an academic appeal or complaint should the candidate receive an unsuccessful outcome.