

10.6 Procedures for the Conduct of the Research Degree Oral Examination

Introduction

- 1 Please refer to Section 5.2, regulations 53 - 95 for details of the Research Degree Regulations examination process, and 96 - 108 for details regarding the format of the thesis. For Professional Doctorates, please refer to Section 5.3 Regulations 44 - 91.
- 2 Normally only the candidate, the examiners, the independent chair and, where the candidate permits, the supervisor, may be present at the oral examination.
- 3 The Research and Postgraduate Office is responsible for ensuring that a suitable room is provided for the oral examination. The Research and Postgraduate Office will also ensure that adequate supplies of liquid refreshments are provided. If the examination is taking place via video link the Research and Postgraduate Office will ensure that relevant audio-visual equipment is provided.
- 4 The Research and Postgraduate Office is responsible for confirming the date of the oral examination to the candidate, the examiners and the independent chair. It is important that the Research and Postgraduate Office confirms that the candidate can attend on the agreed date as examiners are requested to book travel tickets in advance.

Guidance for Examiners

- 5 The examiners are required to produce a preliminary report and shall do this not later than two weeks before the date scheduled for the oral examination. These reports should be prepared independently, and the examiners should not confer until after the reports have been written. The reports must be returned to the Research and Postgraduate School Office no later than one week before the oral examination.
- 6 Within the normal examining process the preliminary reports are not shown to the candidate, but the examiners must be aware of a candidate's access rights under data protection legislation.
- 7 Each examiner should express a view on whether the thesis as presented provisionally satisfies the requirements of the degree. In arriving at this decision examiners are not making a final judgement about the outcome of the examination.

Proceeding to the oral examination

- 8 If an examiner's preliminary report recommends a pass with minor corrections, a list of the corrections should be prepared prior to the oral examination and be made available on the day of the examination.
- 9 Once a date has been scheduled for the oral examination, the external examiner/s should organise transportation to the venue in order to ensure travel costs are kept to a minimum. If an examination is scheduled to take place before 11am and the travel time is in excess of two hours, examiners may claim an overnight stay. A guide to expenses will be made available to all examiners.
- 10 Examiners should arrive at least 30 minutes before the start of the oral examination in order to meet the other examiners and the independent chair. The examiners should agree a format for the examination including the order of questions and the likely length of the examination.

- 11 Examiners should note that the independent chair will run through some procedural matters at the start of the examination and can call for a comfort break during the examination.
- 12 Examiners must submit the joint recommendation report on the day of the oral examination. If a recommendation is made for the submission of minor amendments a list of the corrections must be agreed and submitted to the independent chair on the day of the oral examination (see 10 above). If a recommendation is made for a re-submission (with or without an oral examination) a report on the deficiencies of the thesis should be agreed and submitted to the independent chair on the day of the oral examination. If this is not possible the independent chair can allow up to five working days after the examination for the submission of the report.

Guidance for Independent Chairs

- 13 The Research Degree Regulations stipulate that all oral examinations will be chaired by a senior academic within the University, with experience of research degree examining, who is independent of the candidate's supervisory team and of the research topic.
- 14 The independent chair is not an examiner. Her/his role is to:
 - i ensure that regulations and procedures are adhered to;
 - ii ensure the examination process is fair;
 - iii produce a brief formal record of the proceedings.
- 15 The independent chair will not be required to read the thesis; participate in the discussion; or make any contributions to the academic examination or evaluation of the thesis. The independent chair is not expected to have any academic expertise in the area being examined.
- 16 The Awards Board sub-committee for Research Degrees will nominate members of staff at the first meeting of the academic year to act as independent chairs. The secretary of the Awards Board sub-committee for Research Degrees will confirm terms of office with nominated staff.
- 17 Each independent chair will be asked to attend no more than six oral examinations during the academic year.
- 18 The Research and Postgraduate Office will organise briefing sessions for independent chairs to ensure they are familiar with the Research Degree Regulations in relation to the oral examination. Independent chairs should contact the Research and Postgraduate Office if they have questions relating to the regulations or guidance documentation.
- 19 The Research and Postgraduate Office will send the independent chair details of the candidate and the examiners, a copy of the thesis and arrangements for the day. The preliminary reports will normally be sent to independent chairs prior to the oral examination. Independent chairs should collect these reports from the Research and Postgraduate Office if there is insufficient time to post them before the day of the examination.
- 22 At the outset of the examination the independent chair shall:
 - i explain their status and role, including the fact that they will make a formal record of proceedings;
 - ii ensure that any procedural issues are discussed and resolved at the examiners' preliminary meeting (see 12 above); this may include a discussion on how exactly

the thesis will be examined (e.g. order in which examiners will ask questions, chapter-by-chapter analysis, etc);

- iii ensure that the candidate is introduced to each examiner;
- iv provide the candidate with an opportunity to disclose any mitigating circumstances pertaining to the oral examination;
- v endeavour to establish an atmosphere in which the candidate will be able to perform to the best of her/his ability;
- vi make it clear that any supervisors attending the examination do so as observers only, and that they shall take no part in either the examination or in the evaluation of the student's performance after the examination;
- vii ensure that the candidate is advised that information on the outcome of the examination will not be given before the end of the oral examination and that s/he should not infer any decision from the questions and discussion.

23 During the examination the independent chair shall:

- i intervene in the examining process if s/he judges that fairness to the candidate is at risk;
- ii allow scope for the oral examination to be open-ended and to follow interesting lines of debate, whilst ensuring that the focus of the examination is on the candidate's work;
- iii take a brief record of proceedings, on the overall conduct of the examination including areas or questions which the candidate had difficulty with, and the ways in which the examiners addressed such difficulties. These notes should be returned to the Research and Postgraduate Office within five working days of the oral examination;
- iv when necessary, offer the candidate and members of the examining team the opportunity for a comfort break;
- v ensure that the candidate has an opportunity to make any points which s/he feels have not been appropriately covered.

24 After the examination the independent chair shall:

- i request that the supervisor leave the room during the examiners' discussion;
- ii ensure that the examiners' recommendations comply with the regulations;
- iii ensure that, where the recommendation requires, the examiners agree and submit:
 - a. a written indication of the amendments and corrections required following a recommendation of minor amendments, and that a date for the submission of these minor corrections should be set (normally within 3 months); or
 - b. written guidance on the deficiencies of the first submission following a recommendation of a re-submission of the thesis (with or without a further oral examination) and that the examiners are aware that a re-examination would take place within the period of one calendar year from the date of the latest part of the first examination.

- 25 The independent chair may be approached by the Student Casework Office in the event of an appeal against the decision of an examination.