



**Guidance for External and Internal Examiners and
for Convenors and Chairs of Examining Boards for Research Degrees
(MbyRes, MPhil, PhD, Professional Doctorates)**

This document should be read in conjunction with the following regulations and codes of practice:

- Regulations for Postgraduate Research Programmes (Regulation 03)
- Code of Practice for Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards of Research Programmes (Code 03)
- Code of Practice for External Examiners: Research Degree (Code 05)

1. Administrative Arrangements

The Head of School shall be responsible for ensuring that the School has the correct administrative procedures for the submission and examination of theses. The Chair of each Examining Board shall be responsible for ensuring that the thesis is examined, and the results reported, in accordance with the University's regulations and procedures.

External and Internal Examiners must submit their preliminary reports before the date for the oral examination. Examining Boards are expected to complete the examination of the candidate and submit their final reports as soon as reasonably possible and normally no later than 3 months from receipt of the thesis. If the Examiners are unable to meet these deadlines, they must notify the Convenor and Secretary of the Board of the reasons for the delay. The University is, however, concerned to avoid candidates facing lengthy delays during the examination process.

2. Duties of the Examiners

Examiners must judge the thesis on the basis of the standard and scope of work which it is reasonable to expect from a postgraduate research student after a specified period of study (as defined by Regulation 03, and particularly in paragraph 11 or paragraph 14).

Examiners are required to conduct an oral examination of candidates who have submitted a thesis for a research degree. If an examination of a re-submitted thesis is being conducted, the requirement to conduct an oral examination may be waived, at the discretion of the Examining Board (as defined by paragraph 54 or paragraph 60 of Regulation 03).

3. Award Criteria

The detailed criteria for each type of research degree are defined in Regulation 03 as:

Masters by Research and MPhil

9. Masters by Research are awarded after successful completion of study and research. The research must normally be (a) a substantive evaluation and analysis of a body of knowledge and/or (b) an original research project.
10. The Degree of Master of Philosophy (MPhil) is awarded after successful completion of study and research. The research must normally be (a) a critical evaluation and analysis of a body of knowledge and/or (b) an original contribution to knowledge.
11. Students must show, for a specified field of study or area of professional practice:
 - i. a systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice
 - ii. a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship
 - iii. originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline
 - iv. conceptual understanding that enables the student:
 - to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline
 - to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses.

Professional Doctorates and PhD

12. Professional Doctorates are awarded after successful completion of an approved taught course and successful completion of further study and research.
13. The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) is awarded after successful completion of study and research.
14. Professional Doctorates and PhDs are awarded to students who show:
 - i. an ability to create and interpret new knowledge through original research or other advanced scholarship. The work must be at the forefront of the discipline, of a quality to satisfy peer review, and must merit publication.
 - ii. acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice
 - iii. an ability to conceptualise, design and implement a research project and to adjust the project design in response to unforeseen problems
 - iv. a detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry.
15. Students following a postgraduate research programme in Language, Cultural Studies or Creative and Performing Arts can also meet the requirements for the award of a postgraduate research degree by demonstrating, through their research, an ability to complete works that can include: original translation, version or adaptation, artefact, score, portfolio of original works, performance or exhibition.

4. Presentation of Theses

Theses must be presented as defined by Regulation 03. Regulation 03 defines the expected content and format of theses.

5. Examination of Theses

The procedures for examination of theses are defined in Regulation 03 as:

73. An Examining Board will comprise the following :

- chair
- internal examiner (except for students who are members of staff)
- external examiner
- second external examiner (only for students who are members of staff)

The selection criteria for examiners are defined in the Code of Practice for External Examiners: Research Degrees (Code 05).

74. The chair of the Examining Board must be an experienced member of the academic staff of the School or, if the circumstances demand, of another School at the University. An experienced member of staff at a collaborating institution can chair the Examining Board, subject to the terms of a collaborative agreement.

75. A student's supervisor(s) must not be appointed as chair or internal examiner. The supervisor can attend the oral examination only if:

- i. the student requests that the supervisor be present and this request is agreed by the chair or
- ii. the Chair, having considered evidence presented in accordance with paragraph 78 and/or paragraph 79, requires the supervisor to be present or
- iii. the internal or external examiner requests that the supervisor be present and this request is agreed by the Chair and student.

A supervisor attending an oral examination can speak only at the invitation of the Chair. In order to allow the student an opportunity to describe extenuating circumstances, the Chair can exclude the supervisor from parts of the examination.

76. If it is not possible to appoint an internal examiner from within the School, an internal examiner can be appointed from another School.

77. If it is not possible to appoint an internal examiner from another School, the Chair of the Quality Assurance and Validation Task Group (or nominee) can, on the recommendation of the Head of School, appoint an additional external examiner as described in the Code of Practice for External Examiners: Research Degrees (Code 05).

78. A student can inform the Chair of the Examining Board if there are any extenuating circumstances relevant to his/her research project, the thesis or its examination. The Chair must be informed in writing within 21 days of presenting the thesis. At the discretion of the Chair, the student can present details of the extenuating circumstances during the oral examination.

79. A supervisor can inform the Chair of the Examining Board if there are any concerns relevant to the student's research project, the thesis or its examination. The Chair and the student must be informed in writing as soon as possible after the presentation of the thesis, allowing time for the student to prepare a response. The Chair must make sure that the student has sufficient time to respond to any concerns raised by the supervisor.

6. The Oral Examination

6.1 The oral examination is an integral part of the examination process for a research degree and examiners are asked to exert great care to avoid giving the impression at any time that the oral examination is, in any sense, a mere formality. The purpose and arrangements for oral examinations are defined in Regulation 03 as:

80. The purpose of the oral examination is to:

- allow the examiners to assure themselves that the thesis is the student's own work
- give the student an opportunity to defend the thesis and clarify any matters raised by the examiners
- allow the examiners to assess the student's general knowledge of his/her particular area of study.

81. The oral examination will normally be conducted at the University or, with everyone's agreement, by video conference, normally involving a University site and one other site. If the student is not attending a University site, then the members of the Examining Board should be together at the University site. If the External Examiner is not attending at a University site, then the other members of the Examining Board and the student should be at the University site.

82. The oral examination can only be conducted at another place if the Chair of the Senate Regulations and Special Cases Committee agrees. The oral examination can be conducted at a partner institution if the postgraduate research programme is part of a collaborative agreement.

83. The oral examination must normally be held within 3 months of the date when the thesis was submitted. The Chair of the Examining Board can defer an oral examination if there are extenuating circumstances that prevent the student from attending. The oral examination may not be deferred for more than 6 months from the date when the thesis was submitted.

6.2 At the oral examination candidates should be encouraged and made to feel at ease so that they can display their knowledge and abilities to best effect. The strengths as well as the weaknesses of the thesis should be acknowledged and explored. At an early stage in the proceedings, candidates should be given an opportunity to explain precisely what their thesis is intended to achieve and what they believe to be its significance as a contribution to knowledge. If there appears to be a major discrepancy between the candidate's aims and the content of the thesis, the reasons for this should be explored. Likewise candidates should be asked to explain their choice of title when there appears to be an imperfect correspondence with the contents of the thesis. Candidates should also be given the opportunity to explain any apparent failure to use important materials, whether primary or secondary, or neglect of relevant approaches or methodologies.

6.3 Where a thesis reveals significant deficiencies, all of these, or a representative sample if extensive, should be drawn to the candidate's attention. The candidate must be given an opportunity during the oral examination to explain and defend areas that are considered to be deficient.

6.4 It is possible that examiners will differ to a greater or lesser extent in their evaluation of the work. It is, therefore, essential that the examiners confer before the oral examination so that, should significant divergences of opinion be identified, a strategy be devised to attempt to resolve these differences by agreed means (e.g. the structuring of the oral examination). Although it is desirable that the examiners strive to resolve their differences, should it prove impossible for them to do so, the Chair of the Board should report this fact to the Academic Registry, and no recommendation should be made. In these circumstances an additional, Arbitrating External Examiner will be appointed, as detailed in paragraph 29 of Code 05.

7. Guidance on the Completion of the Examiners' Report Forms

- 7.1 Reporting on the examination of a research degree is a three part process. Three forms (with specific versions for each type of research degree) are provided for the examiners. The forms must be returned to the Academic Registry together with the Notice of Candidature.

Form 1: Used by the Internal and External Examiners to provide a preliminary report on the thesis. The Chair of the Examining Board should arrange for the Internal and External Examiners to consider the content of each other's reports, normally immediately prior to the oral examination. The reports should be sufficiently detailed to assess the scope and significance of the thesis and to appreciate its strengths and weaknesses. Reports should, as far as possible, be expressed in terms that may be understood by those who are not specialists in the particular field of the thesis. Evaluative comments should be as full as possible and should include an indication of strengths as well as weaknesses, limitations and omissions.

Form 2: Used by the Examining Board to report on the oral examination and to report the result recommended by the Examining Board. The result should be indicated by ticking the relevant box(es). The form must be signed and dated by the examiners and by the Chair of the Board. If there is disagreement between the examiners regarding the result of the examination, the 'Summary of Examiners' Recommendation' should not be signed, but instead the Chair should notify the Academic Registrar, who will issue further guidance.

Form 3: Used by the External Examiner to report on the overall examination process. This may be returned directly to the Academic Registry under separate cover if desired.

Examiners are advised that candidates will be provided with a copy of these reports following the oral examination.

8. Examining Board Decisions

The decisions that may be reached by Examining Boards are defined by Regulation 03. Examining Boards must choose Option A, B or C.

Option A. Award the degree using Option A1, A2 or A3

A1. Without conditions

A2. After completing minor corrections.

These must be completed within 4 weeks from the date when the student receives official notification of the result of the examination. Minor corrections do not require academic re-assessment, for example, typographical errors or minor re-organisation of material.

The internal examiner must verify that the corrections have been made.

A3. After completing substantive amendments.

These must be completed within 6 months (or 4 months for Masters by Research theses) from the date when the student receives official notification of the result of the examination. The external examiner must verify that the corrections have been made.

Option B. Conduct a further examination (refer) using Option B1 or B2

Option B1 is not used after examining a Masters by Research thesis or a thesis that has been resubmitted

B1. Student permitted to resubmit the thesis, on payment of a re-presentation fee, within 12 months. Theses can be resubmitted for awards as listed below:

MPhil – resubmit for either MPhil or Masters by Research

DMin – resubmit for either DMin, MPhil or Master of Ministry (MMinRes)

EdD – resubmit for either EdD, MPhil or Master of Education (MEdRes)

DClinPsy – resubmit for DClinPsy

PhD – resubmit for either a PhD, MPhil or Masters by Research

If Option B1 is chosen, the Examining Board must also specify whether a viva voce examination is required after a thesis is resubmitted.

If the student chooses not to resubmit then the Examining Board must choose one of the options defined in Section C.

B2. Student must attend another viva voce examination:

i. without requiring any corrections to the thesis

ii. with minor corrections to be completed within 4 weeks and before the viva voce examination

After this examination (or if the student chooses not to attend), the Examining Board must then choose option A, B or C, but option B2 is not normally used.

Option C. Decide that the student has failed to achieve the standard required.

For the Masters by Research and the DClinPsy the Examining Board must use option C2

For all other awards, the Examining Board must choose Option C1 or C2.

C1. Award an alternative qualification as follows, choosing option C1-i or C1-ii:

MPhil – award Masters by Research in relevant subject

DMin – award Master of Ministry (MMinRes)

EdD – award Master of Education (MEdRes)

PhD – award MPhil.

i. without conditions

ii. with minor corrections to be completed within 4 weeks. The internal examiner must verify that the corrections have been made.

C2. No degree awarded.

Examiners should only choose this option for the Masters by Research, the DClinPsy or when a resubmitted thesis has been examined.

If a thesis has to be corrected (as defined by sections A2, A3, B2ii or C1ii), the School must issue a letter within 10 working days of the oral examination to let the student know when the corrected thesis has to be submitted. The School must also provide a list of the corrections suggested by the examiners. If a thesis has to be resubmitted (as defined by section B1) the Academic Registry will issue a letter within 5 working

days of receiving the Examining Board's decision to let the student know when the corrections have to be completed. Schools must make sure that there are procedures in place to check that corrections have been completed before the deadlines. If a thesis is not resubmitted before the deadline, the School must notify the Academic Registry and refer the case to the Chair of the Examining Board to take action, as defined by the options available to the Examining Board.

9. Payment of Fees and Expenses Claims

The payment of fees and expenses to External Examiners is the responsibility of the Academic Registry and all queries or concerns concerning payment of fees/expenses should be addressed directly to the Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance & Enhancement).