Guidelines for conducting Research Degree Viva Voce examinations

Academic Year 2014/15
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This guidance has been produced for use by members of examination panels for research degree students' *viva voce* examinations. It is intended to aid examiners, particularly the internal examiner and/or independent chair, in ensuring the proper and fair conduct of the *viva voce* examination. This guidance is complementary to the requirements for the examination set out in the *Regulations* and the *Code of practice for research degrees* and should be read in conjunction with those documents. Examiners are also advised to familiarise themselves with the *Regulations for academic integrity* and, in the case of Practitioner Doctorate, any programme specific requirements.

1 **Role of the Chair**

1.1 Unless an independent chair has been appointed in accordance with General Regulations, the internal examiner will perform the dual role of chairing and examining at the *viva voce* examination. The key functions of chairing are to ensure that:

- The *viva voce* examination process is rigorous, fair, reliable and consistent
- The candidate has the opportunity to defend the thesis and respond to all questions posed by the examiners
- Questioning by the examiners is conducted fairly and professionally
- The examiners adhere to the University's General Regulations, giving advice on these matters if required
- The examiners’ preliminary reports have been completed and received prior to the *viva*
- That the recommendations of the examiners are communicated clearly to the candidate and in a timely fashion

1.2 An Independent Chair (if appointed) is *not* expected to question the student about the work being examined; to this end, it is *not* expected that an Independent Chair should receive or read a copy of the thesis or portfolio in preparation for the examination.

1.3 In the case of disagreement between the examiners, the role of the Independent Chair (if one has been appointed) is confined to advising the examiners on the regulatory options; the Chair does *not* have an additional casting vote but should use his/her best endeavours to help the examiners to reach an agreed position.

2 **The Viva Voce Examination**

2.1 At the start of the examination, the Internal Examiner/Chair should introduce all parties present, and ensure that the candidate has seen a copy of the *Code of Practice for Research Degrees* and the appropriate set of General Regulations and read all of the relevant sections.

2.2 During the examination and the discussion held afterwards, the Internal Examiner/Chair should be prepared to interrupt the examination in the following circumstances:
• To provide advice on regulations, procedures, policy and practice

• Where there is any activity that is not ‘rigorous, fair, reliable or consistent’

• Where there is any activity which contravenes the University’s Equal Opportunities Policy

2.3 Should it become necessary to interrupt the normal course of the examination for any of the above reasons, the Internal Examiner/Chair may feel it appropriate to call a temporary intermission in the examination in order to speak with the (other) examiner(s) in private.

2.4 When the examiners have finished their discussions with the candidate, the Internal Examiner/Chair should ensure that everyone, including the candidate, has had an opportunity to ask any questions. In cases where the supervisor(s) is/are in attendance at the viva, the candidate may wish to speak with the examiners in the absence of the supervisor(s) and the Internal Examiner/Chair should be prepared to facilitate this.

2.5 The Internal Examiner/Chair should draw the proceedings to a close and explain the next steps. Ordinarily, the Internal Examiner/Chair will ask the candidate to withdraw from the room and to return at an agreed time, while the examiners consider the outcome(s) of the examination and their recommendation to the RDC.

3 Examination Outcomes

3.1 The examiners will make one of the recommendations permitted by the General Regulations.

3.2 In the event that the examiners cannot agree on a single recommendation, the Internal Examiner/Chair should explain that the examiners are able to submit separate reports. In this event, the Research Degrees Committee shall appoint an additional external examiner to review the thesis and the original examiners’ reports which will be anonymised. The additional examiner may require the student to undergo another viva voce examination. The Research Degrees Committee shall consider the reports of all examiners before reaching a decision.

3.3 It is the responsibility of the Internal Examiner/Chair to explain this (very infrequent) procedure to the candidate.

4 Academic Misconduct

The procedures for handling academic misconduct by students are detailed in the General Regulations.

5 To Conclude the Examination

5.1 The Internal Examiner/Chair should ensure that the candidate is informed expeditiously of the outcome of the examination. The Internal Examiner/Chair must sign and date the examination entry form, ensuring that the other examiner(s) also sign to indicate that it is a joint recommendation.
5.2 The timeframes for providing lists of corrections to the candidate are set out in the General Regulations. The table below summarises these:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>By whom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specified minor corrections or revisions</td>
<td>10 working days</td>
<td>Internal examiner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resubmission</td>
<td>10 working days</td>
<td>Academic Registry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3 The Internal Examiner is responsible for ensuring that the following forms are sent to the relevant Faculty PGR Administrator as soon as possible:

- The completed and signed entry form (original)
- The examiners' pre-viva reports on the thesis/portfolio (originals)
- Any additional reports from supervisors
- Any additional reports on the conduct of the *viva voce* examination
- Copy of the of the list of corrections or revisions (if applicable)
- Copy of the statement of requirements for a re-submission (if applicable)

5.4 Faculty administrators should retain copies of all the relevant forms and send the originals of (i) and (ii) above and copies of other forms to the Academic Registry; the award recommendation cannot be processed without this paperwork.

5.5 Should the examination raise concerns either in respect to the conduct of the *viva* itself, or in respect to the management of or provision of resources for the research project the Internal Examiner/Chair should supplement the report forms with a written report to the Senior Academic Quality Officer (Postgraduate).

6 Data Protection

In accordance with Data Protection legislation, examiners’ reports may be made available upon request to the candidate after the *viva voce* examination has taken place.

Revised July 2014