**UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX**

**POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH EDUCATION TEAM**

**Notes for Examiners**

**Examining Staff Candidates**

# Procedure for Examination of a staff candidate

The procedure for examination is covered in detail in the Higher Degree Regulations, which can be found at <https://www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/regulations>

# Requirements of the award

# Members of staff of the University and its Partner Institutions may apply to become students for a research degree and will be registered as students. The regular requirements of the award for the degree submitted will be applicable for staff candidates, but they will be examined as a member of staff, with two External Examiners with an Independent Chair.

# Students who teach (Graduate Teaching Assistants, Graduate Laboratory Assistants, and Graduate Demonstrators) are not considered members of staff.[[1]](#footnote-1)

# DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (PHD)

# A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy must embody the results of research carried out during the approved period of study. In the thesis and the oral examination the candidate is required to conduct and present original investigations that make a significant contribution to knowledge, to test ideas, whether the candidate’s own or those of others, to understand the relationship of the theme of the investigations to a wider field of knowledge and to express him/herself clearly and concisely.

# In the case of a thesis involving original creative output, the thesis must embody the results of research carried out and/or output created during the approved period of study. The thesis must contain a commentary that addresses the originality and artistic relevance of the work. Within the thesis and oral examination the student must show evidence of the originality of the work, demonstrate an understanding of the relationship of the theme of the thesis to a wider field of knowledge, make a significant contribution to knowledge/the genre, and must express him/herself clearly and concisely.

**Word length**

The maximum word length of the thesis is 80,000 words, excluding any references and bibliography. Maximum word length for a thesis including creative output may vary depending on the format of the thesis. The University of Essex does not stipulate a minimum number of words required.

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY (MPHIL)**

A thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Philosophy must embody the results of research carried out during the approved period of study and should make a contribution to knowledge. In the thesis and the oral examination the candidate is required to present the results of research that either forms original work or is an ordered and critical exposition of existing knowledge. The thesis should set out the relationship between the candidate’s work and the wider field of knowledge, and should be expressed clearly and concisely.

In the case of a thesis involving original creative output, the thesis must embody the results of research carried out and/or output created during the approved period of study. The thesis must contain a commentary that addresses the originality and artistic relevance of the work. Within the thesis the student must show evidence of the originality of the work or an ordered and critical exposition of existing knowledge/the genre. The thesis should demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the candidate’s work and the wider field of knowledge/the genre, and should be expressed clearly and concisely.

**Word Length**

The maximum word length of the thesis is 50,000 words, excluding any references and bibliography. Maximum word length for a thesis including creative output may vary depending on the format of the thesis. The University of Essex does not stipulate a minimum number of words required.

**MASTERS BY DISSERTATION**

A dissertation for the degree of Masters by Dissertation is required to present the results of research carried out during the approved period of study and should demonstrate advanced understanding of the area of study. In the dissertation and the oral examination the candidate is required to present the results of research that either forms original work or is an ordered and critical exposition of existing knowledge. The dissertation should set out the relationship between the candidate’s work and the wider field of knowledge, and should be expressed clearly and concisely.

In the case of a dissertation involving original creative output, the dissertation must embody the results of research carried out/or output created during the approved period of study and should demonstrate advanced understanding of the area of study. The dissertation must contain a commentary that addresses the originality and artistic relevance of the work. The dissertation should set out the relationship between the candidate’s work and the wider field of knowledge/the genre, and should be expressed clearly and concisely.

**Word Length**

The maximum word length of the dissertation is 30,000 words, excluding any references and bibliography. Maximum word length for a dissertation including creative output may vary depending on the format of the dissertation. The University of Essex does not stipulate a minimum number of words required.

# Pre-viva procedures

* The candidate completes a submission form (RD1).
* The staff member submits three copies of the dissertation to the Postgraduate Research Education Team which, at this stage, may be in spring-backed or similar binders. The candidate should retain a further copy of the dissertation.
* Please read the procedure for submission detailed in the document ‘**Policy on Thesis Submission, Deposit and Retention’**, which is available to download [here](http://www.essex.ac.uk/staff/exams/postgrad.aspx).
* The dissertation copies are sent simultaneously to the external examiners. The examiners are also sent an email informing them that the dissertation has been dispatched. The email contains copies of the relevant forms relating to the examination process. After reading, the examiners are asked to independently make their initial, individual reports on the forms accompanying the dissertation and to send them back to the Postgraduate Research Education Team as soon as possible. It is a requirement that these independent reports are received **at least one week** before the viva takes place, in accordance with University procedures.
* The Independent Chair will receive a copy of the thesis two weeks before the viva takes place. Additionally, the Independent Chair will receive an electronic copy of the Joint Report (RD4) form, which should be filled as soon as possible after the viva and returned to the PGRE team.
* **There should be no contact between the examiners regarding the actual dissertation until after the initial reports have been returned.** However, examiners may discuss arrangements for the oral examination.
* After the Postgraduate Research Education Team receives the initial examiners reports, the copies of the reports will be exchanged between the examiners by the PGRE team.

# The examiners’ roles

## Role of the external examiner

The external examiner's duties are as follows:

* to read the thesis;
* to reach an independent judgment on the thesis, against the appropriate criteria for the award, without consulting the other examiner about the assessment, and to record this on a Preliminary Report Form prior to the viva;
* to send their completed Preliminary Report Form to the Postgraduate Research Education Team **at least** **one week prior** to the viva;
* to attend the viva and viva pre-meeting;
* to come to an agreement with the other examiner as to the outcome of the examination;
* with the other examiner, to complete the Joint Report Form;
* in the case of a pass with revisions, both the examiners must complete the ‘Approval of Revisions’ form.
* in the case of a referral, normally to re-examine the referred thesis.

**Role of the Independent Chair**

The Independent Chair is not an examiner. Their role is to facilitate the examination process and procedures, as follows:

The Independent Chair is not expected to make the arrangements for the viva, but should liaise with the Graduate Administrator from the candidate’s department who is responsible for such arrangements.

* To inform the examiners as necessary of the University’s procedures.
* To ensure that the examination is conducted in accordance with the University’s procedures.
* Where necessary, to help mediate between the examiners to identify possible recommendations and facilitate an agreed outcome.
* To ensure that the conduct of the viva provides the candidate with an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and to explain/defend their work.

**Responsibilities of the Independent Chair**

* To attend the pre-viva meeting to advise the examiners on any procedural matters and to help agree the approach to the viva.
* The Independent Chair does not read the thesis in advance of the viva (but has access to a copy for the viva).
* At the beginning of the viva, to introduce the examiners and to explain the format of the viva to the candidate.
* The Independent Chair does not participate in the questioning of the candidate on the content of the thesis.
* During the viva, to recommend an adjournment for a break if the examination exceeds two hours, or earlier if necessary.
* Exceptionally, the Independent Chair may adjourn/suspend the viva where he or she has concerns about its conduct.
* When the candidate has left the room for the outcome to be determined by the examiners, the Independent Chair shall advise the examiners on any procedural matters (e.g. outcomes available to them) as necessary.
* The Independent Chair shall play no role in the academic assessment.

# Oral examination/Viva Voce Examination (Viva)

**Purpose of the viva**

The viva is a long-established part of the examination process for a research degree. The main focus of the assessment is on the written dissertation, however, the viva, which is the oral part of the assessment, is used to inform the examiners’ final assessment decision.

**Venue**

The venue for the viva should be reasonably quiet and without interruption.

A viva may be conducted via video link in accordance with the [University Policy on the *Conduct of a Research Degree Viva by Video Link, Skype or an equivalent audio-visual service*](https://www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/regulations/codes-higher.aspx).

**Who attends?**

The viva for staff candidates will involve two external examiners, the candidate, and the Independent Chair, who will be appointed by the Dean.

Staff candidates must attend a viva, except when the Dean may, on sufficient grounds submitted by the examiners, excuse a candidate from the viva.

## Appointment of an Independent Chair

As determined by the [University Policy on the *Appointment of an Independent Chair*](https://www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/regulations/codes-higher.aspx), the Dean will appoint an Independent Chair to oversee the conduct of the viva.

**Duration**

The length of a viva will vary but if it is longer than two hours the Independent Chair will recommend an adjournment for a break.

**Discussion between examiners**

On the day of the viva, before seeing the student, the examiners should have a pre-viva meeting. At this meeting, they can discuss their initial assessment and agree the approach to viva, including the areas of questioning. The examiners should also decide whether they wish to advise the candidate at the start of the viva of their initial assessment of the dissertation.

**Introductory remarks to candidate**

The Independent Chair shall:

* Introduce him or herself and the external examiner;
* Confirm the purpose of the viva;
* Explain anything the examiners have agreed about how they will proceed to conduct the viva.

The Independent Chair should endeavour to establish an atmosphere in which the candidate will be able to perform to the best of her/his ability.

**Questioning**

The examiners will normally start with some general/introductory questions that are designed to put the candidate at ease. The phrasing and tone of questions should be such that the candidate is able to provide helpful clarification, and appropriate evidence and elaboration. Questioning should not be hostile or designed to ‘catch the student out’.

**Reaching a decision**

Once the viva has finished, the candidate will leave the room and the examiners will reach a decision on the recommended result.

**DECISION AGREED**

If the examiners agree on the decision, the examiners will ask the student back in to inform of their recommendation.

At the end of the viva, the Independent Chair shall ensure that arrangements are in place for completion of the Joint Report Form (and any accompanying paperwork).

The Joint Report will include a place to record that the viva was conducted with an Independent Chair present and that s/he was satisfied with the conduct of the viva. The Independent Chair should then sign the Joint Report form themselves and return all examination paperwork to the Postgraduate Research Education Office.

## FAILURE TO AGREE

Where the examiners are unable to agree on the outcome, the Independent Chair shall advise the candidate. Two new examiners shall then be appointed. The new examiners shall examine the thesis and conduct a viva. The new examiners may recommend to the Dean any result that was open to the original examiners and their decision on the recommendation shall be final, subject only to any right of appeal that may be given under the provisions of other Regulations.

# Post-viva

**Recommendations**

**Thesis by published works**

The examiners for a submission by published work shall declare the result of an examination for:

1. the degree of Doctor of Philosophy as 'pass', ‘minor corrections to the summary’ ‘resubmission of published work on one further occasion only’, ‘award of Master of Philosophy’ or 'fail';
2. the degree of Master of Philosophy as 'pass', ‘minor corrections to the summary’ ‘resubmission of published work on one further occasion only’, ‘award of Masters by Dissertation’ or 'fail';
3. the degree of Masters by Dissertation as 'pass', ‘minor corrections to the summary’ ‘resubmission of published work on one further occasion only’ or ‘fail’.

The examiners for a submission by thesis may recommend any result that is available for the degree examined (see Regulations 4.52, 4.57 or 4.68).

**Examination outcomes**

**Please note:** The following viva outcomes will only apply to candidates submitting on or after 1st January 2017.

The Examiners **MUST** complete the appropriate parts of Sections A, B and D on the Joint Report (RD4) form. Examiners may recommend **one** of the following examination outcomes on academic grounds:

1. **Pass with *no corrections or minor typographical/presentational corrections***. The candidate makes any corrections prior to submission of the final version of the thesis.
2. **Pass with *minor corrections* to be made within three months**. The examiners must provide a list of corrections that they wish to see made. Minor corrections should not require the candidate to conduct further research or undertake substantial further work. These include typographical errors, clarifying points, rephrasing, editing/adding paragraphs, correcting references, etc. Both the external examiners must confirm in writing that these have been made satisfactorily. Corrections must be made and the thesis submitted within three months.
3. **Pass with *major corrections* to be made within six months.** The examiners must provide a list of corrections that they wish to see made. Major corrections require the candidate to undertake substantial further work but the corrected thesis should not require re-examination. Such major corrections include more extensive editorial revisions, the addition of substantial new material, re-writing of substantial parts of the thesis, re-analysis of existing data, etc. Both the external examiners must confirm in writing that these have been made satisfactorily. Corrections must be made and the thesis submitted within six months.
4. **Referral for re-examination in up to 12 months.** The candidate has not met the requirements for the degree examined but may resubmit, on one occasion only, a revised thesis for re-examination within 12 months. The examiners must provide a statement describing the shortcomings of the thesis and the changes required. These may include, amongst other things, editorial corrections and revisions, rewriting a part, parts or the whole of the thesis, the carrying out of further research and/or experimental work. They must also specify the referral period, which should not normally be less than six months or exceed 12 months.

If the result is ‘fail’, the Dean may on the recommendation of the examiners either permit the candidate to re-submit the thesis and be re-examined for a lower award within three terms or determine that the candidate be immediately eligible for the conferment of a lower award (see Regulations 4.35-4.36).

If a revised thesis is required, as a result of the examiners’ decision to refer the thesis or allow a failed thesis to be resubmitted for a lower award, there shall be a further oral examination, except when the Dean, on sufficient grounds submitted by agreement of both examiners, excuses a candidate from a further oral examination. Students who are referred will be required to register and pay the relevant fee and the re-examination fee even if working away from the University.

In addition, the examiners may recommend one of the following:

1. **Award of a (lower award) with minor corrections to be made within three months.** The candidate has not met the requirements for the degree examined but has met the requirements for the (lower award) subject to the approval of minor corrections. The examiners must provide a list of the corrections that they wish to see made. Minor corrections should not require the candidate to conduct further research or undertake substantial further work. These include typographical errors, clarifying points, rephrasing, editing/adding paragraphs, correcting references, etc. Both the external examiners must confirm in writing these have been made satisfactorily. Corrections must be made and the thesis submitted within three months.
2. **Award of a (lower award) with major corrections to be made within six months.** The candidate has not met the requirements for the degree examined but has met the requirements for the (lower award) subject to the approval of major corrections. The examiners must provide a list of the corrections that they wish to see made. Major corrections require the candidate to undertake substantial further work but the corrected thesis should not require re-examination. Such major corrections include more extensive editorial revisions, the addition of substantial new material, re-writing of substantial parts of the thesis, re-analysis of existing data, etc. and both the external examiners must confirm in writing that these have been made satisfactorily. Revisions must be made and thesis submitted within six months.
3. **Referral for a (lower award).** The candidate has not met the requirements for the degree examined but may resubmit a revised thesis for re-examination for a (lower award). The examiners must provide a statement describing the shortcomings of the thesis and the changes required. These may include, amongst other things, editorial corrections and revisions, rewriting a part, parts or the whole of the thesis, the carrying out of further research and/or experimental work. They must also specify the referral period, which should not normally be less than six months or exceed 12 months.
4. **Fail.** The examiners must provide a clear statement describing the shortcomings of the thesis.

**Return of report form**

At the end of the viva the Joint Report (RD4) form must be completed and signed by both examiners and returned immediately to the Postgraduate Research Education Team.

In the case of a ‘referral’, ‘pass subject to three months’ corrections’ or ‘pass subject to six months’ revisions’, a statement of such corrections **MUST** be attached to the Joint Report (RD4) form.

The RD4 form and the examination outcome recommended by the examiners will have to be approved by the Dean. The Dean may require additional information when considering the recommendations. Examiners should respond to such requests accordingly.

The candidate will be informed formally of the result of the examination by the Postgraduate Research Education Team.

**Return of dissertation copies**

With the exception of a recommendation of ‘referral’ by the examiners, the dissertation copies should either be returned to the candidate or the Postgraduate Research Education Team, and this should be clearly indicated on the Joint Report (RD4) form.

In the case of a ‘referral’ one copy of the dissertation **MUST** be returned to the Postgraduate Research Education Team and the other to the candidate.

When completing your reports, please bear in mind that it is University policy that research degree candidates are entitled to receive copies of the examiners’ pre and post viva reports on their dissertation upon request.

**Financial forms**

The external examiners are responsible for returning all completed financial forms to the Postgraduate Research Education Team after the viva, for payment to be approved.

Apart from exceptional circumstances, only expenditure on second-class rail, bus or coach fares will be reimbursed. Costs for any other form of transport (such as airfare) must be approved by the Postgraduate Research Education Team in advance of the viva. We would not normally expect External Examiners’ expenses claims related to travel to exceed £250.

Car mileage may only be claimed where public transport was not available, where it is the cheaper mode of transport, or in other exceptional circumstances. **Please refer to the reverse of the ‘Claim for reimbursement of travel/ subsistence expenses’** for more detailed information.

The Postgraduate Research Education Team will cover the costs of a meal for up to three people (both the Examiners and the Independent Chair) at a rate of £30 per person.

In addition to the cost of a meal, the Postgraduate Research Education Team would normally cover the cost of a snack/drink up to the value of £10 for the External Examiner; for example, refreshments at the train station during their travels.

## Publication of Result

A candidate shall normally be informed of the result of the viva within one month from the date of the viva. Candidates are entitled to receive copies of the examiners’ reports on their thesis on request, when examining is complete.

## Conferment of the Degree

The Dean determines the conferment or otherwise of the degree.

## Appeals and Complaints

A student or candidate has the right to appeal a viva outcome following the [*Appeals Procedures*](http://www.essex.ac.uk/students/exams-and-coursework/ppg/pgr/default.aspx).

A student or candidate has the right to make a formal complaint following the [*Student Concerns and Complaints Procedure*](http://www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/documents/policies/complaints.pdf).

1. Regulations 4.40-4.46. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)