



PGR Examinations and Assessment: Disagreement between Examiners

If the Examiners are unable to unanimously agree an examination outcome during the *viva*, the following process must be followed:

1 Process

- 1.1 Where the Examiners cannot agree on an examination recommendation, they will each prepare an independent final report and forward this to the Research Degree Administration Team (Student Life).
- 1.2 The Research Degree Administration Team (Student Life) advises the relevant S/IDPR; the S/IDPR or their nominee initiates a consultation with the Examiners and will attempt to agree a joint decision.
- 1.3 If the Examiners cannot reach a consensus, an Independent (External) Examiner will be appointed to appraise the thesis and, where appropriate, to re-examine the candidate to determine an examination outcome. The Independent (External) Examiner will be informed that the previous Examiners failed to settle on an agreed examination outcome. The original Examiners will take no further role in the examination process.
- 1.4 If a candidate's first examination attempt resulted in disagreement between the Examiners, copies of the Examiners' reports and/or details of the disputed outcome **must not** be shared with the Independent (External) Examiner in order that an unbiased judgement may be made. Where disagreement occurs in respect of a first examination, a follow up *viva* examination must be held.
- 1.5 Where a further *viva* examination is required the examination arrangements will be made by the appropriate School or Institute, normally within four months of the original *viva* date. An Independent Chair must be appointed to attend the examination (refer to section 7 of the Policy on Research Degree Examinations and Examiners, [Appendix 8 of the PGR CoP](#)).
- 1.6 For PhD, MPhil, MD, campus-based and Online Professional Doctorate degrees the possible outcomes of the examination(s) shall be as defined in the relevant Ordinances and Frameworks governing these degrees. Where disagreement occurs in respect of a first *viva* the Independent (External) Examiner's assessment will be conducted as a fresh examination attempt and the Examiner will have access to the same range of examination outcomes that were available to the original team of Examiners. Where disagreement occurs in respect of a re-submitted thesis, the Independent (External) Examiner will have access to the full range of re-submission examination outcomes as detailed in the relevant programme ordinance. The decision of the Independent (External) Examiner is final.

- 1.7 Where the Independent (External) Examiner determines that the thesis requires amendment by the candidate, the revisions, regardless of their scale or quantity, must be completed to the satisfaction of the Independent (External) Examiner.
- 1.8 The Independent (External) Examiner's report will be shared with the candidate and their supervisors by the Research Degree Administration Team (Student Life) when the assessment process has been completed.
- 1.9 Where disagreement between Examiners occurs in respect of a re-submission examination outcome, point 1.4 above will **not** apply. In these circumstances the Independent (External) Examiner will review the re-submitted thesis alongside the joint final report of the original Examiners from the candidate's first *viva* examination. Independent final reports of the original Examiners that refer to the disputed re-submission outcome and/ or details of the disagreement **must not** be shared with the Independent (External) Examiner in order that an unbiased judgement may be made. Where disagreement occurs in respect of a re-submitted thesis the Independent (External) Examiner will determine whether a follow up *viva* examination is required.

2 Duties and Responsibilities of Independent (External) Examiners

Independent (External) Examiners must have prior experience of examining degrees at PGR level and, in accordance with the terms of their appointment, have the following responsibilities:

- 2.1 The Independent (External) Examiner must notify the Research Degree Administration Team (Student Life) immediately if they can no longer act as Examiner and wish to withdraw from the appointment.
- 2.2 To read the thesis and prepare an independent report giving their view on the submission. In situations where disagreements arise in respect of a re-submission examination outcome, the Independent (External) Examiner is also responsible for determining whether a further *viva* is required.
 - a) The Independent (External) Examiner's report must be submitted to the Research Degree Administration Team (Student Life) within three months of thesis submission. Where no further *viva* is needed the final assessment outcome will be confirmed in the Independent (External) Examiner's report, alongside details of any required revisions.
 - b) Where a follow up *viva* is required, the Independent (External) Examiner has the following additional responsibilities (see sections 2.2 b) i-v below):
 - i. To meet with the Independent Chair on the day of the examination before the candidate is examined, in order to agree an outline of how the examination will proceed and confirm the possible outcomes of the *viva* permitted in accordance with the relevant Ordinance governing the degree award.
 - ii. To participate in the examination and to determine an outcome, using their knowledge and experience in order to ensure that there is consistency of standards with external benchmarks.
 - iii. To conduct themselves in the examination in a way that is fair and reasonable and gives the candidate every opportunity to explain and defend their work.

- iv. To ensure that informal feedback on the thesis and examination is given to the candidate on the day of the examination.
 - v. To submit their report alongside the details of any revisions to the Research Degree Administration Team (Student Life) no later than ten working days after the *viva* examination. The Independent (External) Examiner's report must not be disclosed to or discussed with the candidate or the Supervisors until the Examiner's appraisal of the thesis is complete.
- 2.3 To retain a copy of the examined thesis until the assessment process has been completed.
- 2.4 The Research Degree Administration Team (Student Life) is responsible for passing the Independent (External) Examiner's full feedback, including required revisions to the thesis, on to the candidate. Recommendations regarding re-submission should be provided in appropriate detail. The Independent (External) Examiner must not be requested by either the candidate or Supervisors to review the revised work in progress, i.e. before it is re-submitted.
- 2.5 Where minor modifications have been requested to the thesis, the Independent (External) Examiner will appraise and approve the modifications and sign a form to this effect, which must be forwarded to the Research Degree Administration Team (Student Life). It is expected that such modifications will be completed by the candidate within three months from the date of the formal notification of the outcome of the examination process by the Research Degree Administration Team (Student Life), and will be approved by the Independent (External) Examiner within ten working days of receipt by them of the modified thesis submitted by the candidate.
- 2.6 Where major modifications have been requested to the thesis, the Independent (External) Examiner will appraise and approve the modifications and sign a form to this effect, which must be forwarded to the Research Degree Administration Team (Student Life). It is expected that such modifications will be completed by the candidate within six months from the date of the formal notification of the outcome of the examination process by the Research Degree Administration Team (Student Life), and will be approved by the Independent (External) Examiner within ten working days of receipt by them of the modified thesis submitted by the candidate.
- 2.7 Where a re-submission outcome, which is available on one occasion only, is selected by the Independent (External) Examiner as part of their initial assessment of the thesis, they will also determine whether an accompanying *viva* examination is required. It is expected that the revisions to the thesis will be completed by the candidate within one calendar year of the date of formal notification of the outcome of the examination process by the Research Degree Administration Team (Student Life), and where a further *viva* examination is required it will normally take place no later than three months after the thesis re-submission date.
- 2.8 To treat the thesis as privileged and confidential information.