

17 Oral Examinations (Viva Voce)

17.1 All students are examined orally in English, (except when submitting under Regulation 11.2), on the programme of work and on the field of study. However, in cases of sickness, disability or comparable valid cause, an alternative form of examination may be approved. Such cases require the approval of the Higher Degrees Committee on the recommendation of the examiners and/or supervision team.

17.2 The purposes of an oral examination are:

- a) to establish that the submitted work is that of the student;
- b) to give the student the opportunity to defend the direction, structure and conclusions of the work. This involves the examiners making constructive criticisms of both the research and the thesis and giving the student the opportunity to respond;
- c) to explore with the student any particular issues in the thesis or submitted work which require clarification or development. This is particularly important in cases where the examiners feel that their final decision could be other than an unconditional pass;
- d) to test the student's personal eligibility for the award of the degree by exploring his/her understanding of issues arising in and from the research and of the relationship of the research to the wider field of knowledge. In the case of a PhD student, the student should be able to demonstrate his/her understanding of the nature and extent of the original contribution to knowledge entailed in the research.

17.3 If one or more of the examiners contact the Graduate School Office to say that, in their opinion, the standard of the thesis is such that the oral examination should be postponed, the Chair of HDC shall consider the matter and decide whether or not to allow the scheduled oral examination to proceed. If the decision is to postpone, then student, supervisors and examiners will be notified of this and of actions that need to be taken in order that the oral examination can be re-scheduled at a later date.

Postponement will normally not exceed six months and in any case will not exceed one year.

17.4 One of the student's supervisors who is not an examiner should attend the oral examination to answer questions, unless the student has expressed a wish to the contrary. The purpose of this is to assist the student and examiners with matters of clarification only and not to participate in the oral examination. Attendance by a supervisor is not compulsory but if the student feels that this would be helpful, the University then expects the supervisor to be at the oral examination.

- 17.5** Oral examinations must normally take place with the student and the examination team present at the same location.
- 17.6** The recording of the proceedings of the oral examination, by any method, is normally prohibited.
- 17.7** The oral examination should **normally** last between one and two hours. The pattern for each particular oral is for the examiners to determine but in most cases the examiners will wish to focus on a detailed consideration of the research, its methodology and its findings. In some cases, however, the examiners could wish to focus on a discussion of broader aspects of the research process or findings, or the implications for policy/research, or publication possibilities. For this, the student could be invited to highlight aspects or issues that appear most important or interesting.

Supervisors of students who are undertaking their research degree by Exhibition, Performance or similar work must arrange **prior** to the viva for the full examination team to have sight of the work. This may be in the form of a performance to which the examination team are invited or could be a private showing of the work set up for this purpose. This showing can take place well in advance or on the day of the viva voce. The student must ensure the final submission is accompanied by some permanent record (for instance, computer disk, video, photographic record, musical score, choreographic notation, diagrammatic representation) of the exhibition, performance or other creative work where practicable, bound with the thesis and with the electronic copy. In addition, it is expected that normally the textual component of the submission sent to examiners should be accompanied by documentary evidence in photographic/video form of the creative work undertaken.

- 17.8** The intention is that oral examinations should be constructive and stimulating for all participants. The students should expect to be challenged on their ideas, but should be assured that the experience is intended to be helpful and positive. In preparation, students are advised to re-familiarise themselves with their thesis, make their own assessment of its strengths and weaknesses, and try to anticipate issues that are likely to be raised. The student must bring a copy of his/her thesis with them to the oral examination.
- 17.9** No communication shall be made with a student for the award of a distinction of the University which purports to be, or might reasonably be taken to be, official notification of the results of the candidature, except by the Graduate School Office on behalf of the Academic Registrar.