

## Guidance Notes for Examiners

### 1. Introduction

These Guidance Notes are issued by the Graduate School and are intended to assist examiners and supervisors in their preparation for and conduct of examinations of candidates for the degrees of Master of Research, Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy. They are based on the Research Degree Regulations and Procedures of De Montfort University.

### 2. Responsibilities in Relation to the Examination Process

The respective responsibilities of the Supervisor, the Examiners and the Graduate School are as follows:

#### 2.1 The First Supervisor (or Second where necessary)

- a) to complete the Examination Arrangements form on myResearch at least three months prior to the submission of thesis and submit the form together with a copy of the External Examiner's CV to the Graduate School for approval by the Faculty Head of Research Students or equivalent role and the Director of the Graduate School. Ensure evidence is provided that confirms the External Examiner is eligible to work in the United Kingdom to the Graduate School. To inform the examination team of their nomination and of the subsequent approval;
- b) to make the administrative arrangements for the oral examination, this involves consulting the student and the external and internal examiners as appropriate, notifying all concerned of the date, time and place of the oral examination and attending the examination to answer questions, unless the student has expressed a wish to the contrary;
- c) to complete Section B of the 'master copy' of the Examiners' Report Form and to pass this to the internal examiner immediately before the examination. The report must provide contextual information on the student's work, e.g. mentioning any technical problems experienced during the research or any personal difficulties faced by the student;
- d) following an examination where examiners require minor corrections or major revisions to be made to the thesis, to obtain details of these from the examiners and to pass them onto the student. The 'Statement of Thesis Deficiencies' or the 'Statement of Reasons for Failure' should be completed as soon as possible after the examination is concluded and **definitely within 20 days of the examination.**

## 2.2 All Internal and External Examiners

- a) to read the thesis as soon as possible after they receive it and to make themselves available to conduct the oral examination as soon as practicable. The University aims to ensure that all candidates are examined as soon as possible and no later than ten weeks after submission of their thesis. This applies to re-submissions also;
- b) to prepare written notes on the thesis and to **complete the independent pre-viva form and submit to the Graduate School 5 days prior to the date of the oral examination**. These notes and pre-viva forms should form the basis of discussion with other examiners immediately prior to the oral examination;
- c) jointly with the other examiners, to complete Section C of the Examiners' Report Form and, where applicable, the 'Statement of Thesis Deficiencies' in myResearch or the 'Statement of Reasons for Failure'. This should be done as soon as possible after the examination is concluded and **definitely within 20 days of the examination**.

## 2.3 The Internal Examiner has particular responsibilities to ensure that:

- a) Those present at the viva understand the university's examination procedures, and the conduct expected during the viva examination itself.
- b) An agreed recommended outcome of the examination process is stipulated (as in regulation 18.2), paying particular attention to noting the examiners' agreement as to whether a second viva examination is required.
- c) A coherent joint summative report on the thesis is completed following the examination. **This should include an overall evaluation of the thesis with the examiners' view of its strengths and weaknesses and a clear evaluation of the contribution to the field made by the thesis**. Where major revisions are required the report should relate clearly to the separate statement of thesis deficiencies which should be completed via myResearch. The statement of thesis deficiencies should be as unambiguous as possible with sufficient detail to allow the student to respond to the examiners' requirements. These requirements may be verbally summarised for the candidate following the viva, but should not be regarded as official notification of the result of the examination (see regulation 17.9).

## 2.4 The Experienced Internal Examiner

- a) to ensure that the completed Examiners' Report Form is passed to the Graduate School as soon as possible and within three working days of the oral examination at the latest. Where appropriate the 'Statement of Thesis Deficiencies' or the 'Statement of Reasons for Failure' should be completed within 20 working days of the oral examination;

- b) if the examiners have decided that minor corrections are required, to consider these (in association with any other internal examiners) once submitted and to notify the Graduate School without delay whether or not they are satisfactory. The Graduate School will provide a form for such notification.

Until such time as the award is conferred upon the student, the internal examiner is required to retain one copy of the thesis collected at the viva voce.

## **2.5 The Graduate School**

- a) to give formal notification to all examiners of their appointment by the Faculty Head of Research Students or equivalent role and the Director of the Graduate School;
- b) to dispatch copies of the thesis to all examiners as soon as it has been formally submitted by the student and examination arrangements have been approved, together with these guidance notes;
- c) to dispatch a copy of the thesis to the Supervisor, along with these Guidance Notes including the 'master copy' of the Examiners' Report Form, with Section A completed and request that he or she makes the administrative arrangements for the oral examination;
- d) to notify the candidate of the result of his/her candidature upon receipt of the completed Examiners' Report Form.

## **3. The Oral Examination**

**3.1** All students are examined orally in English 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 (see Regulation 17.5). Such cases require the approval of the Director of the Graduate School on behalf of the Research Degrees Committee on the recommendation of the examiners.

**3.2** 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 may 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, 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;
- e) the degree of Master of Philosophy (MPhil) and the degree of MA/MSc by Research is awarded to recognise the successful completion under such conditions as are prescribed by Regulations, of a supervised programme of individual research, the results of which have been satisfactorily embodied in a thesis together, under certain circumstances, with another form of presentation as defined in Regulation 1.8 and which:
  - demonstrate an understanding of research methods appropriate to the field of study; and
  - demonstrate critical investigation and evaluation of the topic of research.

- 3.3** One of the student's supervisors who is not an examiner shall normally attend the oral examination, 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 viva. 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.
- 3.4** Oral examinations must normally take place with the student and the examination team present at the same location.
- 3.5** The recording of the proceedings of the oral examination, by any method, is normally prohibited.
- 3.6** There will normally be at least two examiners present - one external examiner who is independent of De Montfort University and one internal examiner.
- 3.7** The oral examination should normally last between two and three 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 may 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.
- 3.8** 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 the his/her thesis with them to the oral examination.

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 on behalf of the Director of Student and Academic Services.

#### **4. Academic Standards**

##### **4.1 The Degree of MA/MSc by Research and the Degree of Master of Philosophy (MPhil)**

The degrees of MA/MSc by Research or the MPhil are awarded to recognise the successful completion, under such conditions as are prescribed by Regulations, of a supervised programme of individual research, development or design, the results of which have been satisfactorily embodied in a thesis (or other presentation as defined in Regulation 11), and which:

- a) demonstrate an understanding of research methods appropriate to the field of study; and
- b) demonstrate critical investigation and evaluation of the topic of research.

##### **4.2 The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)**

The degree of PhD is awarded to recognise the successful completion, under such conditions as are prescribed by Regulations, of a supervised programme of individual research the results of which have been satisfactorily embodied in a thesis (or other presentation as defined in Regulation 11), and which:

- a) demonstrate an understanding of research methods appropriate to the field of study; and
- b) demonstrate critical investigation and evaluation of the topic of research; and
- c) constitute an independent and original contribution to knowledge; and
- d) demonstrate the student's ability to undertake further research without supervision.

For variations from the standard research programme see Regulation 11.

## 5. The Examiner's Recommendation

5.1 Regulation 18 provides for examiners to make one of the following principal recommendations:

- a) the student should be awarded the degree sought; or
- b) the student should be awarded the degree sought, provided that minor factual amendments and corrections in the submitted work are made to the satisfaction of the nominated examiner(s) within a specified period not exceeding three months from the notification of the result to the student;
- c) the student be permitted to re-submit for the degree sought and be re-examined as follows:
  - i) the thesis to be revised and if deemed satisfactory by the Examiners, the student will be exempt from further examination, oral or otherwise; or
  - ii) the thesis to be revised and the candidate must undergo a further oral or alternative examination; or
  - iii) the thesis is satisfactory, but the candidate must undergo a further oral examination or other such examination as the examiners shall specify.

In this case the examiners shall specify the maximum period open to the candidate to re-submit, this period is not to exceed 12 months. The maximum period shall date from the notification of the result to the student.

Examiners shall not make recommendations 18.2 c) if they are examining a student who is already re-presenting *unless* the re-presentation is the outcome of an appeal.

- d) if a student for PhD (including PhD by Concurrent Publication), the student should be awarded the MPhil, if appropriate, subject to corrections on the basis stated in 18.2 b) above. Examiners must only make this recommendation for positive achievement by the student in accordance with 4.1 above;
- e) the student should not be awarded any degree and should be given no further opportunity of examination;
- f) the examiners may also offer a PhD student a choice between accepting an MPhil as in 18.2d) or requiring major revisions over a period of time as in 18.2c) to achieve PhD. The student shall be given no more than two weeks to select the route that they wish to follow.

Before forwarding a recommendation for the award of a degree to The Graduate School the examiners must be satisfied that the format of thesis is in accordance with the University's regulations (see Regulation 15).

Before reaching a recommendation, the examiners may require a further examination additional to the oral examination.

Where examiners recommend in the terms set out in Regulations 18.2 b), c) or d) they shall provide the student and the Graduate School with a written statement, on form 'Statement of Thesis Deficiencies', concerning the deficiencies of the submission or examination and a date by which these amendments are to be completed and returned to the First Supervisor.

*Where the examination team are recommending the student should be awarded the degree sought 'subject to minor amendments and corrections' we would ask they consider an appropriate length of time. In some circumstances three months might be too long, and examiners are encouraged to specify a shorter time in these instances.*

## **5.2 Distinction Between 'Minor Factual Errors' and 'Revise and Re-Present'**

There is a substantive difference between 5.1 b) which is a conditional pass and 5.1c).

The award of a conditional pass would normally be appropriate if all that is required is editorial, typographical and grammatical corrections, or the correction of presentational shortcomings not seriously impairing the argument of the thesis. On the other hand, revise and re-present would be appropriate where technical content was deficient or where errors of presentation had fundamentally and comprehensively impaired the argument and substantial re-writing was required, for example, the inclusion of new data, fieldwork or practice, new analysis, or substantial new additions to literature would be major amendments.

A practical test of the distinction between is whether the external examiner wishes to see the thesis again. If he or she does so wish then the recommendation should be not to award the degree but to permit the student to resubmit the thesis and be re-examined as outlined in 5.1c) above. If the examiners believe that the thesis can readily be brought to an acceptable standard and does not need his or her further inspection then the student can be passed subject to minor amendments.

## **5.3 Distinction Between 'Revise and Re-Present' and 'Fail'**

Where the thesis is the sole or major element for examination, it should normally only be 'failed' on first submission if the examiners consider that the work could not form the basis of an acceptable thesis at a second attempt. Otherwise, the decision should be 'revise and re-present'.

## **5.4 Decision to recall the student for further oral or other examination**

Where examiners require revision of a thesis in 5.1 c), careful consideration should be given as to whether the candidate should undergo further oral (or other) examination. Practical tests of the distinction are:

- i) Whether carrying out the revisions requires significant new work (such as the gathering of new or additional data and/or any new analysis) that may affect the results and conclusions of the study, such that oral defence of the revised thesis and its findings is likely to be necessary;
- ii) Whether the candidate's knowledge of research methods and the field of study in general require a level of professional development that can only be evaluated by further oral examination ;
- iii) Otherwise, where the examiners are of the view that the specific requirements of the viva voce examination (regulation 17.2) have fallen short of an acceptable standard;

In any event, the decision made by the examiners in respect of the above will be adhered to. Any requirement for, or waiver of, further oral or other examination specified shall be binding.

## **6. Statement of Thesis Deficiencies**

Where examiners recommend a student should not be awarded the degree sought, but should be afforded the opportunity to revise and re-present the thesis within a specified period, they should provide specific written advice as to the deficiencies or inadequacies of the thesis. Accordingly they should complete the 'Statement of Thesis Deficiencies' in myResearch, together with the Examiners' Report Form.

## **7. Statement of Reasons of Failure**

**7.1** Where the examiners recommend that a student should not be awarded the degree sought and should have no further opportunity of examination, the student has the right to appeal. If the student appeals, he/she must be provided with a statement giving reasons for failure. The statement should be as full as practicable whilst safeguarding the confidentiality of the examining process.

**7.2** In order to save time during the appeal process and to avoid troubling examiners further, it is most helpful if the examiners complete the 'Statement of Reasons for Failure' at the same time as they complete the Examiners' Report Form, and return to the Graduate School immediately after the oral examination.

## 8. Lack of Agreement Among Examiners

Should the examiners, despite their best efforts, fail to agree on a joint recommendation, the provisions of Regulation 19 will apply and separate reports are required. If two or more examiners are of the same view they should submit a joint report and any other examiners should submit individual reports; otherwise all examiners should report individually. The standard Examiners' Report Form should be used in all cases, but clearly marked '**NOT AN AGREED RECOMMENDATION - SEE REPORTS OF OTHER EXAMINERS**'.