



Code of Practice

The *Viva Voce* Examination¹

The following outlines the composition and role of the examination panel and the purpose, processes and procedures pertaining to the *viva voce* examination for PhD candidates at the University of Limerick. For further details refer to the University's *Handbook of Academic Regulations and Procedures* available on the Student Academic Administration web site at: www.ul.ie/studentacademicadmin. All postgraduate research forms (PGR forms) are available on the Graduate School web page: <https://www.ul.ie/gps/postgraduate-research-forms>

1. Composition and role of the examination panel

1.1 Composition of the panel

The panel will consist of an independent chairperson and two examiners', one of whom will be internal to the University and the other external (in instances where the candidate is a staff member a second external examiner replaces the internal examiner). In the case of practice-based PhDs, where it is desirable to appoint a practitioner as an external examiner, an academic external examiner shall also be appointed. The chairperson will normally be a UL faculty member who holds a PhD or has supervised a PhD candidate to completion.

The independent chairperson and the examiners' will have been nominated and approved in accordance with the PGR-1 form. When the independent chair and the examiners' are being nominated, due cognisance should be taken of any potential conflicts of interest, including those of a personal, research or professional nature. The *viva voce* examinations are administered and organised by the relevant academic department.

1.2 Role of the independent chairperson

The independent chairperson's role is to manage the *viva voce* examination, ensuring that the candidate is treated fairly, to provide guidance on the University's academic regulations and procedures and ensure that the outcome of the examination is formally communicated in writing to the candidate. The chairperson will make sure that all the required documentation is completed and communicate the outcome to the appropriate parties. The chairperson shall not have been involved in the research, and shall fulfil the supervisory requirements set out in section 5.5 of the University's *Handbook of Academic Regulations and Procedures*.

1.3 Role of the external examiner

The external examiner will normally hold a PhD or have supervised a PhD Candidate to completion. The Examiner shall normally be an academic staff member of a recognised third-level institution and shall have a formal academic and/or professional qualification as well as expertise in the subject area and knowledge of the academic standards required for a PhD degree in the research area of the thesis being examined. The external will usually hold a position as a senior lecturer or professor in a university, or an equivalent position in an appropriate research institution or professional body. The external examiner will, together with internal examiner, carry out a detailed oral examination of the candidate and provide a written academic assessment as per PGR-6 form.

1.4 Role of the internal examiner

The internal examiner will normally hold a PhD or have supervised a PhD Candidate to completion. The Examiner will have relevant expertise in the field of study covered by the

thesis. The internal examiner has an important role in the examination process both as an examiner and, if required, after the examination as an advisor to the candidate on minor corrections or amendments. The internal examiner will be required to confirm in writing to the Graduate School that any corrections have been made.

1.5 Role of the supervisor(s)

The supervisor may attend the examination, subject to the agreement of the examiners' and chairperson, but may not examine or question the candidate and should only provide clarification of any matters when requested by the panel. The supervisor does not participate in the final decision and should leave the examination while such deliberations take place, unless asked to remain by the chairperson.

2. Purpose and format of the *viva voce* examination

2.1 Prior to the Examination:

Two working days before the *viva voce* examination, the external and internal examiners' should share independent pre-*viva* reports with each other and the chairperson. These reports will form the basis of the final examination report, which should be appended to the relevant PGR-6 form (examiners' report).

2.2 Purpose of the examination:

- To allow the candidate to defend the originality of the thesis
- To establish that the work is publishable in whole or in part
- To expand and clarify the candidate's ideas
- To establish that the research has been carried out independently by the candidate
- To test the authenticity of the research and writing
- To determine the candidate's depth of knowledge and understanding of the field of study and of the literature
- To examine the conceptual approach, research methods and techniques used in the thesis
- To examine what was learnt and whether new knowledge was generated
- To consider the candidate's ability to communicate his or her subject and to defend the research
- To give advice on changes, future direction and possible publication

2.3 Format of the examination:

PhD candidates are required to defend their thesis in response to issues raised and will be examined by the examiners'. The chairperson prior to the examination and in consultation with the examiners' will determine the order of questions and the overall format of the examination. Candidates may be asked by the chairperson to briefly introduce their research and summarise their main findings and should be prepared to do so. At the end of the *viva voce* the candidate and the supervisor will be asked to leave the room while the panel deliberates on the outcome. They will normally be called back and informed by the chairperson of the outcome of the examination.

It is the responsibility of the supervisor to propose the examiners' and chairperson, subject to the agreement of the head of department (PGR-1 form), and to arrange the date of the *viva voce* examination and the location. Candidates must be kept informed during this nomination process by their supervisor(s) to ensure that they are aware of the composition of the examination panel and that if they need to make any comment, this is taken into consideration. Candidates must not contact their examiners' prior to the *viva voce* examination. When the Examination Panel has been constituted, all further communication by either the candidate or the supervisor(s) with the external examiner(s) shall be made through the chairperson.

3 Length

The length of the *viva voce* examination may vary in accordance with different disciplinary practices and will depend on the examiners' requirements. As a guideline it should normally be in the range of one hour and a maximum of three hours.

4 Location

The viva will normally be conducted at the University of Limerick unless prior written permission is sought and obtained from the head of department. In exceptional circumstances video/web conferencing may be used subject to agreement between all those involved in the examination, including the candidate.

5 Outcome

At the conclusion of the viva the panel will decide on the outcome and determine the final recommendations. Following the panel's deliberations, the chairperson will normally ask the candidate and supervisor into the room and verbally inform the candidate of the outcome of the examination and the recommendation of the panel, subject to ratification by Academic Council.

Candidates may be verbally advised of any corrections and/or prescribed amendments which may include additional work. The candidate will be informed that any additional requirements will be communicated via the chairperson to them in writing by means of an annotated copy of the thesis, a typed list or both within the timeline outlined below.

The timeline for the submission via the chairperson of minor corrections and/or prescribed amendments (including responses to any comments emanating from the examiners' report(s) along with the revised copy of the thesis submitted to the examiner(s) for reconsideration by the appropriate examiner commences when the candidate receives the aforementioned in writing.

If requested, the Graduate School will forward a copy of the final report to the student, supervisor, head of department and assistant dean for research, together with a note of any additional requirements.

Following the *viva voce* a joint written (typed) report should be prepared and agreed by the examiners'. The typed report must be appended to the PGR- 6 (examiners') form. This report should be sent by the chairperson to the Graduate School within five working days of the *viva voce* examination. Where the aforementioned timeline expires, the chairperson will notify the Dean Graduate & Professional Studies, who will advise the examiner(s) in writing that the report(s) must be returned within a further 15 working days from the date of the *viva voce* examination.

Where an external examiner's report is not returned to the Graduate School in accordance with the aforementioned timelines and subsequent to consultation with the Dean Graduate & Professional Studies, the internal examiner, with support from the chairperson of the *viva voce* examination, shall submit to the Graduate School the relevant report within a further five working days.

6 Disagreements among examiners'

If a disagreement arises among the examiners', the chairperson is required to clarify and, where possible, reconcile differing viewpoints. If this is not possible, the examiners' should submit separate reports via the chairperson to the Graduate School and the matter will be referred to the Vice President Academic Affairs & Student Engagement for final decision. In exceptional circumstances an additional external examiner may be asked to adjudicate.

7 Right of appeal

An appeal against the examiners' decision cannot be made. If the candidate wishes to appeal on the grounds of process, the Dean Graduate & Professional Studies, in consultation with the Vice President Academic Affairs & Student Engagement shall seek the Academic Council's permission to withhold the name of the candidate and the examiners' report until after the hearing of the appeal (for further details see Ch 5: Sec 15 *Handbook of Academic Regulations and Procedures*).

ⁱ In instances where candidates submitting for a Master's degree by research are required to undertake a *viva voce* examination, the aforementioned code of practice will be applied.