

Guidance for Examiners of Postgraduate Research Awards (Covid-19 amendments)

This document includes the variances to the guidance approved for the period covering the Covid-19 pandemic. Variations are highlighted in ~~striketrough~~ and red text.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This guidance has been prepared to explain to examiners the process for conducting the *viva voce*, the expectations for examiners' reports including the joint report and the recommendations that may be made following the *viva voce* examination. A section at the end explains how external examiners may claim for their fees and expenses.
- 1.2 All postgraduate research awards at the University of Southampton are governed by the [Regulations for Research Degrees and Higher Doctorates](#) (referred to from here on as "the Regulations") and the [Code of Practice for Research Degree Candidature and Supervision](#) (referred to from here on as "the Code"). The guidance contained here supplements the information from these sources, but the [Regulations](#) and the [Code](#) must be consulted where clarification is required or where dispute arises during the examination process.

2. The examining team and the independent chair

- 2.1 Normally one internal and one external examiner are appointed to examine the thesis and conduct the *viva voce*. In exceptional cases, one additional external examiner may be appointed ([Regulations for Research Degrees para.56: Examination](#)). Members of staff of the University of Southampton in candidature for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy will be examined by a team consisting of two external examiners and one internal examiner ([Regulations for Members of Staff in Candidature for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy paras.11 and 19](#)).
- 2.2 It is expected that examiners will have sufficient experience and appropriate subject expertise to be able to examine effectively. Criteria for the appointment of internal and external examiners is set out in [the Code \(paras.93-94: Examination\)](#).
- 2.3 The *viva voce* will be chaired either by the internal examiner or by an independent chair. [The Code para.96: The Viva Voce](#) sets out the circumstances in which an independent chair must be appointed. The decision to appoint an independent chair will usually be taken well in advance of the *viva voce*, and the examiners advised accordingly. However, it is possible that a request for an independent chair will be made very late in the process (e.g. if a potential conflict is indicated in the examiners' independent reports). Should an independent chair be appointed, their role is to monitor good practice within the examination, and to ensure that (i) the examination has been conducted according to the [Regulations](#) and the [Code](#); (ii) the student has been treated fairly and appropriately; and (iii) the process was appropriate and the outcome of the examination represents fairly the views of the examiners. An independent chair is not a member of the examining team and is therefore not provided with a copy of the thesis that is to be examined, nor do they contribute to the Examiners' report and recommendation or to the final outcome.

3. Responsibilities of the examiners

- 3.1 Examiners are responsible for undertaking the examination of a research student for a postgraduate research award in accordance with the [Regulations](#) and the [Code](#).
- 3.2 Examiners must be sensitive to the need to treat all research students fairly and equally, to respect diversity, and to take into account in the examining process any reasonable adjustments required for accessibility.

- 3.3 In advance of the *viva voce*, each member of the examining team is required to assess the written thesis and each prepare an independent written report on the work. The report of each examiner will be made available to the other examiner(s) prior to the *viva voce*.
- 3.4 Following the examination, the chair of the examining team (the internal examiner or, if appointed, the independent chair (see *para.2.2* above)) will prepare a report on the conduct of the *viva voce*.
- 3.5 Following the *viva voce*, the *Examiners' Joint Report and Recommendation Form* will be used to record the examiners' agreed views in relation to the core outcomes of the process and their recommendation regarding award. The form must be signed by all members of the examining team.
- 3.6 The examiners' responsibilities do not end with the submission of their joint report. They also include any subsequent assessment and certification of further work that has been required of the research student and/or attendance at any additional *viva voce*.

4. Arranging the *viva voce*

- 4.1 In preparing for and conducting the *viva voce*, reasonable adjustments will be made where necessary, to accommodate any additional needs of the research student and/or any member of the examining team. All attendees to the *viva voce* will be informed if any measures or adjustments will be in place during the examination.
- 4.2 ~~The *viva voce* will typically be held on one of the University's campuses, with the research student and examiners present in the same room. However, and in exceptional circumstances only, the *viva voce* can be conducted with the use of video conferencing (or other suitable technologically-based communication), provided all parties agree to these arrangements and all necessary safeguards are in place to facilitate the smooth running of the examination. These safeguards will include an identification check of the research student, and the appointment of an independent chair (see *para.1.3* above).~~
The *viva voce* should be conducted with the use of video conferencing and all necessary safeguards should be put in place to facilitate the smooth running of the examination. These safeguards include an identification check of the research student. Guidance to support the conduct of a *viva voce* through videoconferencing is available [here](#).
- 4.3 Should a student be able to demonstrate an exceptional reason why the *viva voce* should be delayed until a face-to-face examination can be arranged, approval can only be given if (a) an appropriate on-campus venue can be sourced and the University's Active Campus tier system procedures are followed, and (b) with a caveat that a blended medium may be necessary (e.g. the student could be present on campus but that travel restrictions might render it necessary for one or more of the examiners to be online). Although every effort will be made to accommodate such a request, a time limit of six months from thesis submission to the conduct of the *viva voce* will be imposed. Should it prove impossible to arrange the face-to-face *viva voce* within this timescale, the examination should take place online (unless a valid and exceptional reason for further delay can be demonstrated by the student).

5. Attendees to the *viva voce*

- 5.1 The research student who is to be examined, the examiners, and the independent chair (if appointed, see *para.2.3* above) should be present during the *viva voce*.
- 5.2 A supervisor should be available to provide clarification at the *viva voce* if requested by the examiners. At the request of the research student, one member of the supervisory team may be invited to attend the *viva voce*. A supervisor who attends the *viva voce* will not play an active role in the examination and may not take part in the judgement of the thesis under consideration.

6. Documentation for the examination process

- 6.1 Each member of the examining team will be provided with:

- ~~A soft-bound~~ An electronic copy of the research student's thesis¹
- (if submitted) the student's Covid-19 statement on the impact of disruptions on their work²
- Names of other members of the examining team and their associated institutions (as applicable)
- The [Regulations](#) and the [Code](#)
- The *Guidance for Examiners of Postgraduate Research Awards (Covid-19 amendments)* document
- *Conducting a viva voce as a videoconference: Guidance* document
- The *Submission of a Research Paper PhD Thesis: Guidance* document (only required when student has made their thesis submission in that format)
- The *Examiner's Independent Report* template
- The *Examiner's Joint Report and Recommendation Form* template
- Details on how to claim for fees and expenses (for external examiners only)
- The *Chair's Report* template (for the chair of the examining team only³)

6.2 Should the student to be examined be from a discipline where original practical work may be submitted in part fulfilment of the award's requirements, arrangements will be made for the examining team to access this in an appropriate medium.

7. Completing the examiner's independent report

7.1 In advance of the *viva voce*, and without consultation with other examiners, all members of the examining team are required to conduct an initial assessment of the thesis which is to be examined and to complete the *Examiner's Independent Report on a Postgraduate Research Thesis*.

7.2 The report should include a brief description of the work carried out by the research student, its strengths and weaknesses, and should relate the work to the wider context of the research student's chosen field of research. Examiners may wish to use the report to:

- consider whether the research student has demonstrated a broad knowledge and understanding of their discipline and its associated research technique;
- assess whether the research student has applied the techniques, as appropriate, to their thesis;
- comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis;
- highlight any particular issues that the examiner would like to draw out in the *viva voce*.

7.3 The report should be submitted to the Faculty Graduate School Office **not less than 5 working days** before the date of the *viva voce*. This is to provide sufficient time for all reports to be shared with each member of the examining team to aid the examiners' preliminary discussion (see *para.8.2* below).

7.4 Although the independent report is not usually shared with the research student, examiners should note that, in the event of a request through the Freedom of Information of Act or from

¹ Current University policy is that examiners are provided with an electronic copy of the thesis only. Should an examiner consider that they are unable to examine the thesis in that format, the University will produce a soft-bound copy through its own Print Service but examiners are advised that the time required to produce a soft-bound copy might delay arrangement of the *viva voce*. For data protection reasons, under no circumstances should examiners use a third party service to print the thesis, though printing a copy themselves for their own use is acceptable.

² Adjustments to research projects are a common part of doctoral study, by the Covid-19 pandemic has, in many cases, created noteworthy changes to projects. Where possible, research students should adapt their research activities to address disruption caused by Covid-19 restrictions, but, for theses submitted between 8th February 2021 and 31st July 2022, students are permitted to submit a statement with their thesis on the impact of disruptions on their work. Examiners will consider this statement in relation to the scope and volume of the student's work but will always uphold the requirements for award of research degrees. The quality threshold for the award remains unchanged and there must be no compromise in the integrity of the examination or award. The policy document [Research degree theses and the impact of Covid-19 restrictions](#) policy refers.

³ Should an independent chair be appointed, it is noted that they are not part of the examining team and are therefore not provided with a copy of thesis that is to be examined (see *para.2.2* above).

the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, the research student may access all documentation and email communications relating to their examination.

8. The *viva voce*

8.1 The purpose of the *viva voce*

8.1.1 The purpose of the *viva voce* is to gather further evidence from the research student about their suitability for the award, in particular:

- to ask the research student to clarify issues relating to meeting criteria relating to specific parts of the thesis, to the thesis as a whole, and to the award;
- to ascertain that the thesis is the research student's own work, that they have developed research skills at this level, and that they understand the relationship of the thesis to the wider field of knowledge;
- that in cases where the thesis and/or the research student clearly does not meet the criteria for the award, to try to determine the possible reasons. These may include the abilities of the research student and/or other factors affecting the research such as the quality of research training, the availability of resources, disruptions to the research process, or personal circumstances

8.2 The Examination Room

8.2.1 The *viva voce* is a formal occasion, and the room to be used should be laid out appropriately. Ensuring this is the case is the responsibility of the chair of the examining team. The chair should ensure that:

- the room layout enables clear communication between the research student and the examiners;
- any required technology (e.g. PC/laptop, screen, software) is in place and functioning correctly
- (if in attendance) the member of the supervisory team must be instructed that they may not communicate either verbally or non-verbally with the research student;
- any reasonable adjustments have been made (see *para.4.1* above);;
- there is opportunity to regulate the temperature and light in the room - a window is preferable;
- there is enough table space to accommodate each attendee's copy of the thesis;
- a watch/clock is available and viewable by all attendees;
- fresh water is available to all attendees;
- a 'Do Not Disturb' sign is affixed to the door;
- any telephones in the room (fixed and mobile) are set to silent;
- spare paper and pens are available.

8.3 The examiners' preliminary discussion

8.3.1 In advance of the *viva voce*, the examiners will have access to copies of each examiner's independent report (*paras.7.1-7.4* above). At a preliminary meeting directly before the *viva voce*, there will be an opportunity for the examining team to discuss and agree the key issues to be raised with the research student, the order in which issues will be raised, and which examiner will lead on each issue.

8.4 Commencing the *viva voce*

8.4.1 After welcoming the research student and introducing all attendees, the chair should explain that the *viva voce* provides an opportunity for the research student to defend their thesis in high-level debate with experts drawn from the relevant research community.

8.4.2 As the research student will not have previously undertaken a *viva voce*, it can be helpful to clearly explain the *viva voce* process to them. The chair should state that the examiners have a duty to thoroughly explore both the work presented and the research student's knowledge and understanding of both it and the wider field and that persistent questioning is a normal and necessary part of the process. The research student should also be told that they may, if they wish, consult with their own copy of the thesis throughout the *viva voce*.

8.4.3 If a member of the supervisory team is in attendance, the chair should explain to the research student and to the supervisor that they will not play an active role in the examination and that they are attending in a supportive capacity only and may not ask any questions nor take part in the judgement of the thesis. However, they may note any points which may be useful for the research student after the *viva voce*, but such notes are not considered to be a formal record.

8.5 Questioning the research student

8.5.1 The research student may be extremely nervous and it is important for the examining team to try and settle them down at the start of the *viva voce* by saying something commendatory but non-committal, e.g. “*We found your thesis very interesting, we particularly enjoyed ...*”

8.5.2 The examiners may find it helpful to begin with questions that the research student should be able to answer without undue difficulty, e.g. “*Why did you decide to do this topic? What aspect of the work have you most enjoyed?*” Further questions should then be asked, covering the key issues and in the order agreed by the examiners in their preliminary discussion.

8.5.3 The examiners should use an appropriate range of questioning techniques and should ask questions in a constructive and positive way rather than in a manner that is destructive and negative. For example, “*why did you try to solve the problem using method X rather than method Y?*” is preferable to “*didn't you realise that you could have avoided these difficulties with method Y?*”

8.5.4 When asking general questions (e.g. “*how did you come to study this topic?*”), a mix of open questions and closed questions can be used and examiners should tailor the type of question to the type of answer required. For example, general or open questions are useful in encouraging the research student to reflect upon their work (“*tell me about your methodology?*”) whereas closed questions (“*did you think that the confidence limits were unimportant in this case?*”) will lead to a specific answer. General and open questions are harder to answer but can reveal much more about the research student, and closed questions may reveal less but are easier for the research student to answer.

8.5.5 The research student may need some time to gather their thoughts together and produce a coherent answer. Examiners should recognise this and encourage the student to take time to think.

8.5.6 When a student gives a particularly incisive or interesting answer, it can be helpful to their morale and confidence for the examiners to acknowledge this.

8.5.7 Should a student give a poor answer, this may be because of nervousness or misunderstanding. Rephrasing the question and asking it again gives an able research student the opportunity to recover their position. Conversely, it may confirm limitations in a less able student.

8.5.8 Some examples of poor practice by examiners that should be avoided are cited in (Partington, J., Brown, G., and Gordon, G. 1993. *The Handbook for External Examiners in Higher Education*, Sheffield, CVCP

- ***An inquisitor***

This examiner behaves like a TV interviewer quizzing a politician during an election campaign, rapidly shooting out hostile questions, interrupting the answers and generally trying to score points. Such an approach may intimidate the research student so that he or she is unable to respond, or anger them to the extent that the *viva* becomes an adversarial confrontation.

- ***A proof reader***

This examiner takes research students line by line through their theses asking questions about errors of spelling, punctuation and grammar. If these are exceptionally poor, instead of proof reading in the *viva*, examiners can make it a requirement that the thesis is re-typed or hand the research student a list of corrections after the *viva*.

- **A committee person**
The committee person takes the research student through the thesis page by page questioning each matter as it arises rather than synthesising points into key issues relating to the trigger for the study, the methodology, the design, etc. However, it is also recognised that such very close scrutiny may be necessary for some disciplines.
- **A hobby horse rider**
This examiner has strong feelings or prejudices about one area of the thesis and keeps returning to questions on this while neglecting other aspects of the research.
- **A kite flyer**
The kite-flyer has identified a – usually fairly tenuous – link between the thesis and another subject and persists in exploring this to the detriment of the examination of the topic as defined by the research student, i.e. effectively examines a thesis which the research student did not write.
- **A reminiscer**
This examiner continually regales the research student with stories of their own research career to the detriment of the examination of the research student's work.

8.6 Conclusion of the *viva voce*

- 8.6.1 When the examiners are satisfied that sufficient, relevant evidence has been gathered, the chair should thank the research student for answering the questions and ask if there are any concluding comments which they wish to make.
- 8.6.2 The chair should explain that the examiners will now consult about the outcome and make clear how the recommendation will be communicated to the research student.
- 8.6.3 Should the examiners wish to informally advise the student of their recommendation immediately following the *viva voce*, the chair should clearly state that the recommendation will require formal approval from the Faculty Director of the Graduate School, in their capacity as Chair of the Faculty Graduate School Committee. Awards are made by Senate on the recommendation of Faculty Education Committee.
- 8.6.4 The chair should also explain that, once the outcome has been approved, the Faculty Graduate School Office will provide formal notification of the outcome to the student.
- 8.6.5 If the examiners have annotated their copies of the thesis, the chair should advise the student whether these copies will be returned or retained by the examiners, or whether the copies will be returned to the Faculty Graduate School Office for secure disposal.
- 8.6.6 The research student (and the supervisor, if in attendance) should leave the room in order that the examining team can deliberate in private.

8.7 Completing the chair's report

- 8.7.1 Following the *viva voce*, the chair will prepare a report on the conduct of the *viva voce*, returning it to the Faculty Graduate School Office. The Chair's Report form should be used to confirm that the examination has been conducted according to the [Regulations](#) and the [Code](#); that the research student has been treated fairly and appropriately; and that the recommendation of the examiners is fair and appropriate given the performance of the student (also see *para.2.2* above).
- 8.7.2 The chair should also use this report form to record any concerns about the conduct of the *viva voce*, which will be referred to the Faculty Director of the Graduate School. Should further investigation be considered necessary, the examiners' recommendation will be placed on hold until this has been concluded.

9. Completing the examiners' joint report and recommendation form

9.1 Introduction

9.2 After conducting the *viva voce*, the examining team must recommend one of the courses of action as set out in the [Regulations \(para.58: Outcomes of the Examination\)](#) or, for staff candidates, in the [Regulations for Members of Staff in Candidature for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy para.12](#)).

9.2.1 The *Examiners' Joint Report and Recommendation Form* sets out the criteria for assessing the research student and the recommendations that are available to the examiners. It is used to record the examiners' agreed views in relation to the core outcomes of the research degree and to confirm their agreed recommendation. The examining team should note that the research student will be provided with a copy of the *Examiners' Joint Report and Recommendation Form*.

9.2.2 The *Examiners' Joint Report and Recommendation Form* must provide a sufficiently detailed statement to justify the examiners' recommendation. A research student must satisfy the examiners in both the thesis and the *viva voce* and they may fail the examination because of the thesis, the *viva voce*, or both. The examiners may therefore recommend re-examination only in that part in which the research student has failed and the report must therefore address both aspects of the examination.

9.2.3 In the exceptional circumstances that the examiners are unable to reach agreement, they should each submit an additional independent report to the Faculty Director of the Graduate School who must recommend to the Faculty Education Committee the appointment of an additional external examiner (see the [Code, para. 102: Consideration of Examiners' Recommendations](#)). The Faculty Graduate School Office will provide the additional examiner with a copy of the research student's thesis and the independent reports of the original examiners. The additional examiner will be permitted to interview the research student in the presence of an Independent Chair before submitting a final report and recommendation to the Faculty Director of the Graduate School, in their capacity as Chair of the Faculty Graduate School Committee. They must consider the independent reports of the original examiners, and the report of the additional examiner, before making a recommendation to the Faculty Education Committee.

9.3 The report

9.3.1 The *Examiners' Joint Report and Recommendation Form* should be completed and signed by all members of the examining team, before being submitted to the Faculty Graduate School Office. This should be done within **one working week** of the *viva voce*.

9.3.2 If not being retained by the examiners, their copies of the student's thesis should be returned to the Faculty Graduate School Office with the *Examiners' Joint Report and Recommendation Form*, with instructions for either their return to the student or for secure disposal (see [para.8.5.3](#) and [para.9.3.1](#) above).

9.3.3 Should the examiners recommend any outcome other than award of the degree for which the research student has submitted, clear written guidance on the work required should be submitted to the Faculty Graduate School Office with the *Examiners' Joint Report and Recommendation Form*. **Should any additional instruction have been provided direct to the student by the examiners (e.g. annotated copies of the thesis; lists of required corrections), copies must be appended to the Form to aid the Faculty Director of the Graduate School's consideration of the examiners' recommendation.**

9.3.4 Within **Part A**, the examiners are asked to consider whether the research student has demonstrated an original contribution to knowledge in their subject, field or profession. If NO, the student cannot be awarded the degree for which they have submitted. If YES, the examiners should indicate that (1) the contribution has been made through original research and/or (b) the contribution has been made through original application of existing knowledge or understanding.

- 9.3.5 Within **Part B**, the examiners are asked to confirm that the research student has demonstrated the standards as described in [The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies \(UK Quality Code for Higher Education Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards; \(October 2014\)](#).
- 9.3.5.1 If the answer to all of the statements in Part B is **YES**, an outcome indicating a pass should be selected. At the end of the examination process, the examiners need to certify that they are satisfied that the criteria have been met in full.
- 9.3.5.2 If the answer to one or more of the statements in Part B is **YES (SUBJECT TO SPECIFIC AMENDMENT)**, the extent to which amendment is required should be discussed further in the report, with reference to remedial actions.
- 9.3.5.3 If the answer to one or more of the statements in Part B is **NO**, the research student cannot be awarded the degree for which they have submitted without further work/amendments and, if appropriate, a repeat *viva voce*. A detailed commentary on the extent to which the criteria have not been met must be included against each statement.
- 9.3.6 **Part C** should provide a commentary on the research student's thesis and their performance in the *viva voce*. The examining team may wish to comment on the organisation, structure, presentation, authenticity, content, publishable quality and critical awareness of the subject demonstrated throughout the examination process. Clear details of any remedial actions and amendments which the student is required to make should be expressed here. The commentary in Part C can also be used to reference the statements made in Part B in relation to partial fulfilment of the criteria. If the examiners' individual reports expressed significantly different views as to the quality of the work, this should also be addressed. **As required by the [Research degree theses and the impact of Covid-19 restrictions](#) policy, the examiners' joint report and recommendation form must incorporate an overview of their consideration of a Covid-19 statement, if one has been submitted with the thesis, and their determination of the impact on the scope and volume of the thesis within the context of maintaining the academic standards required for the award. Any thesis amendments or resubmission required by the examiners must take into account any allowance made by them on the limitations in volume and scope of the thesis due to the pandemic. Examiners must consider what amendments are necessary to meet the criteria for the award and must not require additional work aimed only at addressing where research activities have been curtailed by Covid-19 restrictions.**

9.4 The recommendation

- 9.5 The examiners' recommendation must take one of the forms specified in the [Regulations for Research Degrees \(para.58 \(a\) to \(g\): Outcomes of the Examination\)](#) or as in the [Regulations for Members of Staff in Candidature for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy para.12 \(a\) to \(g\): Recommendations of the Examiners](#)). The recommendation must be consistent with the statements made in Part A, Part B and Part C of the *Examiners' Joint Report and Recommendation Form*.
- 9.6 For those research students who are studying for a research degree with a substantial taught component, recommendations (a) to (f) will also be subject to the satisfactory completion of the taught element of the degree. Where the examiners' recommendation is re-examination at a later date, options (d) and (e) are not available as outcomes at the later re-examination.

9.6.1 (a) that the degree for which the research student has submitted is awarded

- 9.6.1.1 If the examiners' judge that the student has demonstrated an original contribution to knowledge in their subject, field or profession and has fully demonstrated the standards as described in [The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies \(UK Quality Code for Higher Education Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards; \(October 2014\)](#) (see *para.9.3.5* above), they should recommend the student for award.
- 9.6.1.2 Furthermore, if the conditions specified in *paras.9.3.4 -9.3.5* above have been fully met and the examiners judge that the only issue with the thesis is that a small number of typographical errors that need no formal review, they may recommend award, but the *Examiners' Joint Report and Recommendation Form*

should advise the student to correct the typographical errors before the final copy of the thesis is submitted to the Library.

9.6.1.3 If, the student's thesis contains a large number of typographical errors, the examiners should not recommend award. Instead, the examiners should recommend option (b) – see *para.9.6.2* below).

9.6.2 (b) that the degree for which the research student has submitted is awarded subject to minor amendments to the thesis⁴ being made by a date specified

9.6.2.1 A recommendation in this category means that the examiners have judged the student to have demonstrated an original contribution to knowledge in their subject, field or profession and to have fully demonstrated the standards as described in [The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies \(UK Quality Code for Higher Education Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards; \(October 2014\)](#) (see *para.9.3.5* above). However, before the award can be made, the examiners require the student to make minor amendments to the thesis such as correcting minor errors/omissions of substance, typographical errors, occasional stylistic or grammatical flaws, corrections to references, minor changes to figures, and/or minor changes to layout. The required amendments require no new research.

9.6.2.2 The *Examiners' Joint Report and Recommendation Form* must clearly specify the required amendments so as to ensure that the research student has a clear understanding of what is expected of them. The commentary may include a reference to correction of typographical errors noted in a marked-up copy of the student's thesis but more substantial amendments must be clearly specified in the report itself.

9.6.2.3 The date specified for the submission of the minor amendments should normally be no later than three months after the formal notification to the research student.

9.6.2.4 Minor amendments need only be certified by the internal examiner. When reviewing the student's amended thesis, the internal examiner must conduct their assessment against the requirements that were specified in the *Examiners' Joint Report and Recommendation Form*.

9.6.2.5 The internal examiner is permitted, on receipt of the amended thesis, to request that the student make a further attempt to complete the required amendments but these should only address points raised in the original examination process (e.g. when a student has failed to make all amendments required to the satisfaction of the internal examiner). The further attempt should be completed and submitted within a timescale specified by the internal examiner, which should be no longer than the timescale given for the first attempt.

9.6.2.6 Once the internal examiner is satisfied that the amendments have been completed to the standard required for the award, they should submit an email to the Faculty Graduate School Office from their institutional (e.g: @soton.ac.uk) email account with the following text: "*I can confirm that, following [insert name of student]'s viva voce of [insert date of viva voce] the minor amendments required by the examiners have been completed to the my satisfaction and I therefore recommend the student for award.*"

9.6.2.7 If, following the further attempt, the internal examiner's view is that the amendments have not been completed to the standard required for the award, the matter will be referred to the external examiner(s) whose view is final.

9.6.2.8 If the external examiner concurs with the internal examiner's view, a fail recommendation should be made and submitted to the Faculty Director of the

⁴ For staff candidates submitting for the award of Doctor of Philosophy by published works, references to the thesis should be taken as referring to the accompanying commentary.

Graduate School. This should be accompanied by a detailed report explaining why the amendments are not considered to meet the standard required for award.

9.6.3 (c) that the degree for which the research student has submitted is awarded subject to the correction of modest amendments to the thesis² being made by a date specified

- 9.6.3.1 A recommendation in this category means that the examiners have judged the student to have demonstrated an original contribution to knowledge in their subject, field or profession and to have fully demonstrated the standards as described in [The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies \(UK Quality Code for Higher Education Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards; \(October 2014\)](#) (see *paras.9.3.5* above). However, before award can be recommended, the examiners require the student to make modest amendments to the thesis, such as to remediate modest errors/omissions of substance, that may require limited further analysis but only to an extent which will not affect the originality of the central thesis. The amendments required will normally not be so extensive that an additional *viva voce* is required; if they are, the examiners should instead select the recommendation as set out in *para.9.6.5* below.
- 9.6.3.2 The *Examiners' Joint Report and Recommendation Form* must clearly specify the required amendments so as to ensure that the research student has a clear understanding of what is expected of them. The commentary may include a reference to correction of typographical errors in a marked-up copy of the student's thesis but more substantial amendments must be clearly specified in the report itself.
- 9.6.3.3 The date specified for the submission of the modest amendments should normally be no later than six months after the formal notification to the research student. Should the examiners wish to request a longer time period (of nine months), an academic rationale should be provided for consideration by the Faculty Director of the Graduate School.
- 9.6.3.4 Modest amendments must be certified by both the internal and external examiners. When reviewing the student's amended thesis, the examiners must conduct their assessment against the requirements that were specified in the *Examiners' Joint Report and Recommendation Form*.
- 9.6.3.5 The examiners are permitted, on receipt of the amended thesis, to request additional amendments but these should only address points raised in the original examination process (e.g. when a student has failed to make all amendments required to the satisfaction of the examiners). Additional amendments should be completed and submitted within a timescale specified by the examiners, which should be no longer than the timescale given for the first attempt.
- 9.6.3.6 Once the examiners are satisfied that the amendments have been completed to the standard required for the award, they should each submit an email to the Faculty Graduate School Office from their institutional (e.g. @soton.ac.uk) email account with the following text: "*I can confirm that, following [insert name of student]'s viva voce of [insert date of viva voce] the modest amendments required by the examiners have been completed to my satisfaction and I therefore recommend the student for award.*"
- 9.6.3.7 If, following the further attempt and where the view of any single examiner is that amendments have not been completed to the standard required for the award, the process for circumstances where examiners are unable to reach agreement (as described in *para.9.2.3* above) will be invoked.
- 9.6.3.8 If the view of **all** examiners is that amendments have not been completed to the standard required for the award, a fail recommendation should be made and submitted to the Faculty Director of the Graduate School. This should be

accompanied by a detailed report explaining why the amendments are not considered to meet the standard required for award.

9.6.4 (d) that the research student is required to attend an additional *viva voce* within three months of the date of the original examination

9.6.4.1 A recommendation in this category means that the examiners have judged that the research student has failed to answer satisfactorily their questions on the work and its context.

9.6.5 (e) that the research student is required to submit, by a date specified, a revised thesis² for the same degree for re-examination (including attendance at an additional *viva voce*) on one subsequent occasion

9.6.5.1 A recommendation in this category means that the examiners have judged that the research student has not demonstrated an original contribution to knowledge in their subject, field or profession (indicating NO in Part A of the *Examiners' Joint Report and Recommendation Form*) or where there has been a significant failure by the research student to demonstrate one or more of the standards as described in [The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies \(UK Quality Code for Higher Education Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards: \(October 2014\)\)](#) (see para.9.3.5 above).

9.6.5.2 Where a research student has been asked to submit a revised thesis in this category, the examination process begins again. The examiners will receive a copy of the thesis, associated report forms, and be required to conduct a second *viva voce*, which should normally take place within three months of re-submission. The examiners are not permitted to re-examine a revised thesis without an additional *viva voce*.

9.6.6 (f) that in the case of a research student who has failed to satisfy the examiners and where a Master of Philosophy is available as an exit award, they are invited to apply, by a date specified, for that award in accordance with one of the following recommendations:

- (i) that the degree of Master of Philosophy is awarded (as per (a) above)
- (ii) that the degree of Master of Philosophy is awarded subject to minor amendments to the thesis being made (as per (b) above)
- (iii) that the degree of Master of Philosophy is awarded subject to modest amendments to the thesis being made (as per (c) above)

9.6.6.1 A recommendation in this category means that the examiners have judged that there has been a significant failure to demonstrate an original contribution to knowledge in their subject, field or profession (indicating NO in Part A of the *Examiners' Joint Report and Recommendation Form*), or where there has been a significant failure to demonstrate the majority of the standards as described in [The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies \(UK Quality Code for Higher Education Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards: \(October 2014\)\)](#) (see para.9.3.5 above), and where the examiners have judged that the research student cannot reasonably repair the issues with the thesis in the permitted timescale.

9.6.6.2 Wherever there is a chance that a research student failing at the first attempt might remedy the work, they should first be given an opportunity to do so. This recommendation is therefore usually reserved when a student has failed to satisfy the examiners following their submission of a revised thesis.

9.6.6.3 In all such circumstances, the research student's submission must meet the criteria for the award of Master of Philosophy.

9.6.7 (g) That the degree for which the research student has submitted is not awarded, resubmission is not permitted, and the research degree is terminated.

9.6.7.1 A recommendation in this category means that the examiners have judged that there has been a significant failure to demonstrate an original contribution to knowledge in their subject, field or profession (indicating NO in Part A of the *Examiners' Joint Report and Recommendation Form*), or where there has been a significant failure to demonstrate the majority of the standards as described in [The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies \(UK Quality Code for Higher Education Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards; \(October 2014\)\)](#) (see para.9.3.5 above), and where the examiners have judged that the research student cannot reasonably repair the issues with the thesis in the permitted timescale.

9.6.7.2 Wherever there is a chance that a research student might remedy the work, they should first be given an opportunity to do so.

10. Approval of the examiners' joint report and recommendation form

- 10.1 Each examiner's independent report ~~and~~, the *Examiners' Joint Report and Recommendation Form* **and any additional documentation/instructions that have been provided by the examiners direct to the student**, will be scrutinised by the Faculty Director of the Graduate School, in their capacity as Chair of the Faculty Graduate School Committee.
- 10.2 The Faculty Director of the Graduate School should, if in doubt, seek assurance from the research student's co-ordinating supervisor that the specification of the actions to be taken by the research student is adequate for the student to be able to complete the task. The Faculty Director of the Graduate School may ask that further clarification is provided by the examiners if deemed necessary prior to approval of the report.
- 10.3 Following the Faculty Director of the Graduate School's approval of the examiners' recommendation, the research student will be given a copy of the completed *Examiners' Joint Report and Recommendation Form* and written guidance on the revisions that are required.

11. Fees and expenses (for external examiners only)

- 11.1 The fee to be paid to the external examiner will be as set out in the letter of appointment. At the time of issuing the letter of appointment, the Faculty Graduate School Office will send the *Bank Information (AP07) form* and the *External Examiner (PGR & PGT only) Claim for Fees and Expenses (AP08) form*, both of which should be completed and returned to the Faculty Graduate School Office following the *viva voce*.
- 11.2 The fee covers:
 - initial assessment of the thesis;
 - submission of the independent report;
 - attendance at the *viva voce*;
 - any subsequent assessment and certification of a revised thesis;

However, where the research student is required to attend an additional *viva voce*, an additional fee can be claimed.

- 11.3 External examiners may claim reasonable expenses if they are wholly, necessarily and exclusively incurred in the course of the University's business and are in accordance with the University's Expenses and Benefits Procedures manual.
 - Rail – the most economical class of ticket, usually standard class return, should be purchased unless other tickets are available at a lower cost.

- Air – payment for air travel may be approved providing the total cost does not exceed that of rail travel plus subsistence costs. The dates of travel and route of journey must be shown.
- Car, motorcycle or bicycle – mileage expenses will be paid at the following rates, per round trip.
Cars: 40p per mile for the first 50 miles; 23p per mile thereafter
Motorcycles: 15p per mile
Bicycles: 10p per mile
- Subsistence expenses will be reimbursed providing full details are shown. Personal expenses, such as alcohol, mini-bars, newspapers, laundry, pay-per-view facilities, should not be claimed.

All original receipts must be submitted with the claim.

- 11.4 Information on visiting the University’s campuses, including road, rail and air connections, can be found [here](#). Advice on booking a visitor car parking space can be obtained from the Faculty Graduate School Office.

12. Examiners’ feedback

- 12.1 External examiners are invited to comment on their experience and perceptions of the overall examination process (including suggestions for enhancements) to the Faculty Director of the Graduate School, by contacting the Faculty Graduate School Office.
- 12.2 External Examiners are also able to make a separate confidential report directly to the University President and Vice-Chancellor (vice-chancellor@soton.ac.uk) on any matter of serious concern, and/or ask any comments submitted to the Faculty Director of the Faculty Graduate School be escalated to the President and Vice-Chancellor.

13. Useful contacts

- 13.1 Although examiners may have other contact with the University (primarily through the research student’s co-ordinating supervisor), formal contacts for the examination process is via the Faculty Graduate School Office. Contact details are as follows:

Faculty Name	Email Address
Arts and Humanities	fah-gradschool@soton.ac.uk
Engineering and Physical Sciences	feps-gradschool@soton.ac.uk
Environmental and Life Sciences	fels-gradschool@soton.ac.uk
Medicine	fmed-gradschool@soton.ac.uk
Social Sciences	fss-gradschool@soton.ac.uk

14. Useful links

[Regulations for Research Degrees and Higher Doctorates](#) (University of Southampton)

[Code of Practice for Research Degree Candidature and Supervision](#) (University of Southampton)

[Quality Handbook](#) (University of Southampton)

[The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies \(UK Quality Code for Higher Education Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards](#) (QAA, October 2014)

[Doctoral Degree Characteristics Statement](#) (QAA, February 2020)

[UK Quality Code for Higher Education: Advice and Guidance \(Research Degrees](#) (QAA, November 2018)

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