

Guidance for Examiners of Postgraduate Research Awards

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This guidance has been prepared to explain to examiners the process for conducting the *viva voce* and the expectations for the production and submission of examiners' reports (including the joint report and the recommendations that may be made following the examination). Section 13 of this guidance explains the external examiners' fee and expenses claim process. **The examination process, including the viva voce, should normally be completed within three months of the student's submission.**
- 1.2 All postgraduate research awards at the University of Southampton are governed by the [Regulations for Research Degrees](#) ("the Regulations") and the [Code of Practice for Research Degree Candidature and Supervision](#) ("the Code of Practice"). The guidance contained here supplements the information from these sources, but the [Regulations](#) and the [Code of Practice](#) must be consulted where clarification is required or where dispute arises during the examination process.
- 1.3 The [Regulations Governing Academic Responsibility and Conduct](#) apply to the examination of the student's thesis and any suspected breach should be reported to the Internal Examiner who is responsible for referring the matter to the relevant School's Academic Conduct Officer for investigation
- 1.4 PGR Manager is the University's system for managing the candidature of its postgraduate research students and includes workflows for the submission and examination of the thesis. **Appendix 1 of this document contains guidance for external examiners on the use of PGR Manager during this process.**

2. The examiners and the [independent] chair

- 2.1 Research students will normally be examined by one external examiner and one internal examiner. In exceptional circumstances, one additional external examiner may be appointed. Two external examiners and one internal examiner must be appointed for a student who is also a member of staff of the University of Southampton. For this purpose, the definition of a member of staff is as set down in the [Regulations for Members of Staff in Candidature for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy](#).
- 2.2 Examiners, both internal and external, should have sufficient experience and appropriate subject expertise to be able to examine effectively. Collectively, the examiners should have acted as examiner for at least three doctoral examiners, and be familiar with examination practice and standards in the UK. Examiners will be nominated in accordance with the criteria for appointment as set down in the [Code of Practice](#). Individuals are required to disclose any actual or potential conflict of interest which could compromise their impartiality, objectivity or professional judgement.
- 2.3 The internal examiner or, where circumstances dictate the appointment of an independent chair, will chair the *viva voce*.
- 2.3.1 The criteria for the nomination and appointment of an independent chair is as set down in the [Code of Practice](#).
- 2.3.2 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).
- 2.3.3 Examiners should not seek to make contact with the independent chair as this could compromise their integrity and the process of examination.
- 2.3.4 An independent chair is **not** a member of the examining team and does not take part in the judgement of the student. As such, they are not provided with a copy of the student's submission.

- 2.4 The chair (or independent chair) is expected to ensure that the examination is conducted according to the [Regulations](#) and the [Code of Practice](#); that the student is treated fairly and appropriately; and that the outcome represents fairly the views of the examiners.

3. Examiners' responsibilities

- 3.1 The examiners are responsible for conducting the assessment of the student's submission in accordance with the [Regulations](#) and the [Code of Practice](#).
- 3.2 Examiners must be sensitive to the need to treat all 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 examiner is required to assess the student's written submission and to prepare an independent written report on the work. Each examiner's independent report will be made available to the other members of the examining team prior to the *viva voce*. Section 8 of this guidance provides further information.
- 3.4 After the *viva voce*, the chair of the examining team will complete the *Examiners' Joint Report and Recommendation Form* which will be used to record the examiners' agreed views in relation to the core outcomes of the process and their recommendation regarding award. The joint report and recommendation must be agreed by all members of the examining team. Section 10 of this guidance provides further information.
- 3.5 After the *viva voce*, the chair (the internal examiner or, where appointed, the independent chair) will prepare a written report on the conduct of the *viva voce* (as per paragraph 2.4 of this guidance). Should there be any reported concerns, the Faculty Director of the Graduate School (or their nominee) should take steps to engage the examiners in discussion with a view to satisfactorily resolving the matter. A record of all discussions should be made and retained with the examination documentation.
- 3.6 The examiners' responsibilities do not end with the submission of their joint report. Responsibilities also include the subsequent assessment

and certification of further work required of the student and/or attendance at any additional *viva voce* and, unless otherwise permitted, the same examining team should be retained throughout the examination process.

4. Preparing for 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 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, e.g.: it is important that the room in which the *viva voce* is to be held is appropriately arranged to ensure physical accessibility and clear communication.
- 4.2 The *viva voce* will typically be held on one of the University's campuses, with the student and examiners present in the same room. However, videoconference (or other suitable technologically-based communication) arrangements can be made for the conduct of the *viva voce*, provided all parties agree to these arrangements and all necessary safeguards are in place to facilitate the smooth running of the examination. These safeguards include an identification check of the student. The Faculty should seek specialist advice from iSolutions as to the best method of facilitating a *viva voce* via videoconference and should consult the [Conducting a viva voce as a videoconference: Guidance](#) for further details.

5. Attendees to the *viva voce*

- 5.1 The student who is to be examined, the examiners (and the independent chair, where appointed) must all be present during the *viva voce*.

6. Role of the supervisory team in the examination process

- 6.1 A supervisor will not normally attend the *viva voce*, but should be available to provide clarification to the examiners, if requested. The student may request that one member of their supervisory team is invited to attend the *viva voce*: any such request must be made by the

student, in writing, to the Doctoral College (Faculty) Team for consideration by the Faculty Director of the Graduate School.

6.2 A supervisor who is in attendance at the *viva voce* must not play any role in the examination and may not take part in the judgement of the thesis under consideration.

7. Documentation for the examination process

7.1 The examiners will be provided with:

- 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;
- The names of all members of the examining team and their associated institutions (as applicable);
- the [Regulations](#) and the [Code of Practice](#);
- the [Guidance for Examiners of Postgraduate Research Awards](#);
- the [Conducting a viva voce as a videoconference: Guidance](#);
- the [Submission of a Research Paper PhD Thesis: Guidance](#) (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;
- information on how to claim for fees and expenses, including the [AP07 Bank Information form](#) and the [AP08 External Examiner \(PGR](#)

¹ Examiners are provided with an electronic copy of the student's thesis only. Should an **external examiner** consider that they are unable to examine the thesis in that format, the Doctoral College (Faculty) Team will arrange for a copy of the thesis to be produced through the University's own Print Service. The Doctoral College (Faculty) Team will not print theses for University of Southampton staff appointed as **internal examiners** – such colleagues should utilise the print facilities in their own Faculty. All examiners should note that the time required to produce a thesis print copy might delay arrangement of the *viva voce*. Under no circumstances, and for data protection reasons, should any examiner use a third-party service to print the thesis, although using their own personal facilities to print a copy of the thesis is acceptable. Where the student who is 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 examiners to access this in an appropriate medium.

² Adjustments to research projects are a common part of doctoral study, but 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 2026, 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.

[and PGT only\) Claim for Fees and Expenses form](#) and the [Travel and expenses guidance for Non-University personnel \(visitors\)](#);

- The [Chair's Report](#) template

8. The examiner's independent reports

- 8.1 In advance of the *viva voce*, and without consultation with other examiners, each examiner is required to conduct an initial assessment of the student's submission and to complete the *Examiner's Independent Report on a Postgraduate Research Thesis*.
- 8.2 The independent report should include a brief description of the work carried out by the student, its strengths and weaknesses, and should relate the work to the wider context of the student's chosen field of research. Examiners may wish to use the report to:
- consider whether the student has demonstrated a broad knowledge and understanding of their discipline and its associated research technique;
 - assess whether the 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*.
- 8.3 The report should be submitted via PGR Manager, or by email to the Doctoral College (Faculty) Team, **not less than 5 working days** before the date of the *viva voce*. This deadline is set so as to provide sufficient time for reports to be shared with each member of the examining team to aid the examiners' preliminary discussion (refer also to *para.8.3* of this guidance).
- 8.4 Although the examiners' independent reports will not usually be shared with the student, examiners should note that, in the event of a request through the Freedom of Information of Act or from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education, the student may access all documentation and email communications relating to their examination.

9. The *viva voce*

9.1 Purpose

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

- to ask the 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 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 student clearly does not meet the criteria for the award, to try to determine the possible reasons. These may include the abilities of the 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.

9.2 The examination venue

9.2.1 The *viva voce* is a formal occasion, and the venue to be used should be set out appropriately. This is the responsibility of the chair of the examining team and they should ensure that:

- the venue 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 student;
- any reasonable adjustments have been made (see *para.4.1* of this guidance);

- there is opportunity for the student and the examiners to regulate the temperature and light in the venue - a window is preferable;
- there is enough 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 of the venue;
- any telephones in the room (fixed and mobile) are set to silent;
- spare paper and pens are available.

9.3 The examiners' preliminary discussion

- 9.3.1 In advance of the *viva voce*, the examiners will have been given access to each other's independent reports.
- 9.3.2 The preliminary discussion provides an opportunity for the examiners to discuss and agree the key issues to be raised with the student, the order in which issues will be raised, and which examiner will lead on each issue.

9.4 Commencing the *viva voce*

- 9.4.1 After welcoming the student and introducing all attendees, the chair should explain that the *viva voce* provides an opportunity for the student to defend their thesis in high-level debate with experts drawn from the relevant research community.
- 9.4.2 As the student will likely not have previously undertaken a *viva voce*, it can be helpful to clearly explain the process to them. The chair should advise the student that the examiners have a duty to thoroughly explore both the work presented and the student's knowledge and understanding of both the work and the wider field and that persistent questioning is a normal and necessary part of the process. The student should also be told that they may, if they wish, consult with their own copy of the thesis throughout the *viva voce*.

- 9.4.3 Should a member of the student's supervisory team attend the *viva voce*, the chair should explain to all present that the supervisor is attending in a supportive capacity only, is not permitted to play any role in the examination and may not ask questions of the examiners or the student nor take part in the judgement of the thesis under consideration. The supervisor may, however, note any points which may be useful for the student after the *viva voce*: any such notes are not considered to form part of the formal record of the examination.

9.5 Questioning the student

- 9.5.1 The student may be extremely nervous and it is important for the examining team to try and relieve their anxiety 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 ...*"
- 9.5.2 The examiners may find it helpful to begin with questions that the 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.
- 9.5.3 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?*"
- 9.5.4 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 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 student, and closed questions may reveal less but are easier for the student to answer.

- 9.5.5 The student may need some time to gather their thoughts together and produce a coherent answer. The examiners should recognise this and encourage the student to take time to think about their response.
- 9.5.6 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.
- 9.5.7 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.
- 9.5.8 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 be 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.

9.6 Conclusion of the *viva voce*

- 9.6.1 When the examiners are satisfied that sufficient and relevant evidence has been gathered, the chair should thank the student for answering the questions and ask if there are any concluding comments which they wish to make.
- 9.6.2 The chair should explain that the examiners will consult in private about their proposed recommendation and make clear to the student how this will be communicated.
- 9.6.3 Should the examiners wish to informally advise the student of their recommendation immediately following the *viva voce*, the chair should clearly state that formal approval from the Faculty

Director of the Graduate School, in their capacity as Chair of the Faculty Graduate School Subcommittee, is required. Awards can only be made by Senate on the recommendation of Faculty Education Committee.

- 9.6.4 The chair should also explain that, once the recommendation has been approved, the Doctoral College (Faculty) Team will provide formal notification of the outcome to the student.
- 9.6.5 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 Doctoral College (Faculty) Team for secure disposal.
- 9.6.6 Once these instructions have been provided, the student (and any supervisor in attendance) should withdraw in order that the examiners' private discussion can start.

9.7 Completing the chair's report

- 9.7.1 Following the *viva voce*, the chair will prepare their own report conduct of the *viva voce* for the Faculty Director of the Graduate School, and submit it via PGR Manager (or by email to the Doctoral College (Faculty) Team. The chair is asked to confirm that the examination has been conducted according to the [Regulations](#) and the [Code of Practice](#); that the student has been treated fairly and appropriately; and that the recommendation of the examiners is fair and appropriate given the performance of the student .
- 9.7.2 Any concerns about the conduct of the *viva voce* should be recorded in detail, so that the Faculty Director of the Graduate School can determine whether further investigation is considered necessary. To preserve the integrity of the examination process, the examiners' recommendation will be placed on hold until any such investigations have been concluded.

10. The examiners' joint report and recommendation

10.1 Introduction

- 10.1.1 After conducting the *viva voce* and private discussions have taken place, the examiners must recommend one of the courses of action as set out in the [Regulations](#) or, in the case of a submission made by a staff candidates, the [Regulations for Members of Staff in Candidature for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy](#).

10.2 The report

- 10.2.1 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' comments regarding the student's performance in relation to assessment criteria and core outcomes of the research degree should be recorded on the *Examiners' Joint Report and Recommendation Form* which, once approved, will be made available to the student.
- 10.2.2 The 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 must therefore address both aspects of the examination when completing the *Examiners' Joint Report and Recommendation Form* and a sufficiently detailed statement which justifies the examiners' recommendation must also be recorded on the *Form*.

10.3 The commentary

- 10.3.1 Within **Part A**, the examiners are asked to consider whether the 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 (a) the contribution has been made through original research and/or (b) the contribution has been made through original application of existing knowledge or understanding.
- 10.3.2 Within **Part B**, the examiners are asked to confirm that the student has demonstrated the standards as described in [The](#)

[Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies , 2nd edition, updated February 2024\).](#)

- 10.3.3 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.
- 10.3.4 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.
- 10.3.5 If the answer to **one or more** of the statements in Part B is **NO**, the 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.
- 10.3.6 **Part C** should provide a commentary on the 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.

10.4 The recommendation

- 10.4.1 The examiners' recommendation must take one of the forms specified in the [Regulations for Research Degrees](#) or as in the [Regulations for Members of Staff in Candidature for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy](#). 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*.
- 10.4.2 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.
- 10.4.3 **(a) that the degree for which the student has submitted is awarded**
- 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 , 2nd edition, updated February 2024](#)), they should recommend the student for award.
 - If the conditions specified in *paras. 10.3.1 to 10.3.6* of this guidance 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 for cataloguing and storage.

- 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) – refer to *para.10.3.4* of this guidance).

10.4.4 (b) that the degree for which the student has submitted is awarded subject to minor amendments to the thesis³ being made by a date specified

- 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; \(October 2014\)](#). However, before the award can be made, the examiners require the student to make minor amendments to the thesis⁴ 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, and require no new research.
- The *Examiners' Joint Report and Recommendation Form* must include a clear written statement of what is required

³ For staff candidates submitting by published work for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, references to the thesis should be taken as referring to the accompanying commentary.

so as to ensure that the 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 thesis⁴ but more substantial amendments must be clearly specified in the report itself.

- The date specified for the submission of the minor amendments should normally be no later than three months after the formal notification to the student.
- Minor amendments need only be certified by the internal examiner. When reviewing the student's amended thesis⁴, the internal examiner must conduct their assessment against the requirements that were specified in the *Examiners' Joint Report and Recommendation Form*.
 - **If the internal examiner is satisfied** that the amendments have been completed to the standard required for the award, they should submit their recommendation via PGR Manager. Alternatively, the examiner's recommendation may be submitted by email (from their institutional email account) to the Doctoral College (Faculty) Team with the following statement: *"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 my satisfaction and I therefore recommend the student for award."*
 - **If the internal examiner is not satisfied** that the amendments have been completed to the standard required for the award, they are permitted, on receipt of the amended thesis, to request that the student make one 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). This 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.

- If, following this further attempt, the 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. **The internal examiner is not permitted to authorise any further attempts.** If the external examiner concurs with the internal examiner's view, a recommendation for a fail 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.

10.4.5 the that the degree for which the student has submitted is awarded subject to the correction of modest amendments to the thesis⁴ being made by a date specified

- 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 2nd edition, February 2024](#). However, before award can be recommended, the examiners require the student to make modest amendments to the thesis⁴, 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 recommendation (e) as set out in *para.10.4.7* of this guidance.

- The *Examiners' Joint Report and Recommendation Form* must include a clear written statement of what is required 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 thesis⁴ but more substantial amendments must be clearly specified in the report itself.
- 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.
- Modest amendments must be certified by both the internal and external examiners. When reviewing the student's amended thesis⁴, the examiners must conduct their assessment against the requirements that were specified in the *Examiners' Joint Report and Recommendation Form*.
 - **If the examiners are satisfied** that the amendments have been completed to the standard required for the award, they should each submit their recommendation via PGR Manager. Alternatively, the examiners' recommendation may be submitted by email (from their institutional email account) to the Doctoral College (Faculty) Team with the following statement: "*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."

- **If the examiners are not satisfied** that the amendments have been completed to the standard required for the award, they are permitted, on receipt of the amended thesis, to request that the student make one 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 examiners). This further attempt 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.
- If, following this further attempt, and where the view of **any single examiner** is that amendments have still 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.10.5.4* of this guidance) will be invoked.
- If, following this further attempt, the view of **all** examiners is that the amendments have not been completed to the standard required for the award, a recommendation for a fail 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. **The examiners are not permitted to authorise any further attempts.**

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

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

10.4.7 (e) that the student is required to submit, by a date specified, a revised thesis⁴ for the same degree for re-examination (including attendance at an additional *viva voce*) on one subsequent occasion

- 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, 2nd edition, February 2024](#).
- Where a student has been asked to submit a revised thesis⁴ 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*.

10.4.8 (f) that in the case of a 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)

- 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 , 2nd edition, February 2024](#)), and where the examiners have judged that the student cannot reasonably repair the issues with the thesis in the permitted timescale.
- Wherever there is a chance that a 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.
- In all such circumstances, the student's submission must meet the criteria for the award of Master of Philosophy.

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

- 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, 2nd](#)

[edition, February 2024](#), and where the examiners have judged that the student cannot reasonably repair the issues with the thesis in the permitted timescale.

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

10.5 Submission of the report

- 10.5.1 The completed *Examiners' Joint Report and Recommendation Form* should be agreed by all members of the examining team, before being submitted via PGR Manager (or by email to the Doctoral College (Faculty) Team). This should be done within **one working week** of the date of the *viva voce*.
- 10.5.2 If not being retained by the examiners, copies of the student's thesis should be returned to the Doctoral College (Faculty) Team with the *Examiners' Joint Report and Recommendation Form*, with instructions for either their return to the student or for secure disposal (see *para.9.6.5* of this guidance).
- 10.5.3 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 of these instructions must be appended to the *Examiners' Joint Report and Recommendation Form* to aid the Faculty Director of the Graduate School's consideration of the examiners' recommendation.
- 10.5.4 In the exceptional circumstances that the appointed examiners are unable to reach agreement, each examiner should submit an additional independent report of the *viva voce* and recommendation to the Faculty Director of the Graduate School who will recommend to the Faculty Education and Student Experience Subcommittee the appointment of an additional external examiner to assess the thesis and the original examiners' reports. . The Doctoral College (Faculty) Team will provide the additional external examiner with a copy of the thesis and the independent reports of the original examiners.

The additional external examiner will be permitted to interview the student in the presence of an independent chair before submitting a final report and recommendation to the Faculty Director of the Graduate School. .

11. Consideration of the examiners' joint report and recommendation

11.1 In their capacity as Chair of the Faculty Graduate School Subcommittee, the Faculty Director of the Graduate School is responsible for approving the examiners' recommendation and determining the outcome. They may, if they consider it appropriate, authorise a single, named deputy to undertake this task who must be an academic member of University of Southampton staff **and** a member of the Faculty Graduate School directorate.

11.2 The Faculty Director of the Graduate School is required to scrutinise the following:

- each examiner's independent report;
- the *Examiners' Joint Report and Recommendation Form* (and, where it is recommended that the student should amend or resubmit their thesis, a clear written statement of what is required);
- any additional instructions that the examiners have provided direct to the student (e.g.: annotated copies of the thesis, lists of required amendments or corrections);
- the chair's [or independent chair's] report.

11.3 Should the Faculty Director of the Graduate School have concerns about the content of the examiners' reports and/or their recommendation, they should take steps to engage the examiners in discussion with a view to satisfactorily resolving the matter. A record of all discussions should be retained and, where necessary, the examination documentation revised and resubmitted to the Faculty Director of the Graduate School. Furthermore, the Faculty Director of the Graduate School should, if in doubt, seek assurance from the student's co-ordinating supervisor that the specification of the actions to be taken by the 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.

12. The outcome, amendment and resubmission of the thesis

12.1 The Doctoral College (Faculty) Team should notify the student of the approved outcome within one month of the date of the *viva voce*. A copy of the *Examiners' Joint Report and Recommendation Form* should accompany the notification. Where amendment or resubmission is required, the examiners' written statement of what is required of the student must be provided. The deadline for submission of the amendments or resubmission of the thesis should be aligned to the date when this statement is provided to the student.

12.2 Where the student is required to amend or resubmit their thesis, they may contact the internal examiner once to discuss the required revisions, but must seek any further clarification and guidance from their supervisory team. The supervisory team is expected to provide continued support to the student during the amendment/resubmission period and, accordingly, the student is expected to consult with their supervisory team.

12.3 Where amendments to the thesis are required, it is expected that the student's submission will be accompanied by a separate document which lists, for the examiners, the changes that have been made and cross-references to the corresponding page or chapter within the thesis.

12.4 Examiners must complete their assessment of the student's amended or resubmitted thesis promptly so as not to delay the approval of a recommendation for award.

- Minor amendments need to be certified by the internal examiner only and approved by the Faculty Director of the Graduate School., The student should normally be informed whether the amendments have been certified within three weeks of their submission.
- Modest amendments need to be certified by both the internal and external examiners and approved by the Faculty Director of the

Graduate School. The student should normally be informed whether the amendments have been certified within six weeks of their submission.

- Where resubmission is required, the re-examination process (including the *viva voce*) should normally be completed within three months of submission, and the student notified of the outcome within one month of the *viva-voce*.

13. Fees and expenses (for external examiners only)

- 13.1 Current external examiner fee rates are published in the [Postgraduate Research Examining Team: Guidance for Faculties](#) and will be set out in the external examiner's letter of appointment. At the time of issuing the letter of appointment, the Doctoral College (Faculty) Team will send the [AP07 Bank Information form](#) and the [AP08 External Examiner \(PGR & PGT only\) Claim for Fees and Expenses form](#), both of which should be completed and returned to the Doctoral College (Faculty) Team following the *viva voce*.
- 13.2 The fee covers the initial assessment of the thesis; submission of the independent report; attendance at the *viva voce*; and any subsequent assessment and certification of a revised thesis. However, where the student is required to attend an additional *viva voce*, the external examiner can claim an additional fee in accordance with the published rate.
- 13.3 External examiners can reclaim the costs of travelling or out of pocket expenses where they were agreed by the University of Southampton in advance of the expenditure being incurred.
- 13.4 All travelling and out of pocket expenses must be in line with the University's Financial Regulations, Policies and Procedures. The [Travel and expenses guidance for Non-University personnel \(visitors\)](#) covers common areas of expense. Original itemised receipts and other supporting documentation must be submitted with the claim to evidence proof of spend.

13.5 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 Doctoral College (Faculty) Team.

14. Examiners' feedback

14.1 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 Doctoral College (Faculty) Team.

14.2 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.

15. Useful contacts

15.1 Although examiners may have other contact with the University (primarily through the research student's co-ordinating supervisor), formal contact for the examination process is via the Doctoral College (Faculty) Team. Contact details are as follows:

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

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Appendix 1: PGR Manager guidance for external examiners

Setting up your PGR Manager account

When your nomination as an external examiner has been approved you will receive two emails from PGR Manager (pgrmanager@infomanaged.co.uk):

1. Confirmation of your appointment as an external examiner at the University of Southampton. The email will include details of the student, the degree for which they are to be examined, the title of their thesis and the name of the internal examiner. It will also contain links to the University's Guidance for Examiners of Postgraduate Research Awards, the University's confidentiality statement and links to the forms you will need to complete in order to claim your examiner's fees and expenses. You should familiarise yourself with all such documentation.
2. Confirmation that your PGR Manager account has been created and a request that you set up your password. You should follow the link and set up your password – this will provide you with access to PGR Manager and permit you to review the student's thesis once it has been submitted and to complete your independent report and the joint examiners' report and recommendation.

Reviewing the thesis and submitting your independent report

You will be notified via email when the student has submitted their thesis for examination. This email will contain information on the process that should be followed before, during and after the examination of the thesis.

To access the thesis, you should click the '**Link to Thesis**' button in the email, as displayed in the example email on the right of this page.

This will take you to the PGR Manager homepage for the student's examination. It is from this page that you can access the thesis and submit your independent report in advance of the *viva voce*.

In the centre of the examination page you will see core information on the student, their supervisory team and the student's research project. On the right hand side of the page is a tab for each stage of the examination process. This is explained on the following screen.

STATUS
Waiting for independent reports
CURRENTLY WITH
On hold
<input checked="" type="radio"/> Submit Independent report

Independent reports

Dear Kevin
Candidate: [REDACTED]
Degree: Doctor of Philosophy
Title of thesis: [REDACTED]
Internal Examiner: [REDACTED]
External Examiner: [REDACTED]
Faculty: [REDACTED]
Supervisor: [REDACTED]
The candidate has now submitted their thesis for examination and it is now available in PGR Manager
Link to Thesis

<p>Thesis examination tabs</p> <p>Downloading the thesis can be completed via the thesis submission tab. When you open the tab you will see a button on the right of the screen named 'Download printable PDF' which you should click on and then select 'with attachments'. This will download a copy of the student's thesis.</p> <p>The Independent Reports tab is where you can upload your independent report. You can also access this via the task bar in the top ribbon (blue box). Select the tab and then on the right of the screen select 'submit independent report' to upload your independent report. You should submit your completed report not less than 5 working days in advance of the date of the <i>viva voce</i>.</p> <p>You will be notified via email that you are able to review the reports of the other members of the examining team when they are available.</p> <p>Viva arrangements sets out the date, time and venue for the <i>viva voce</i>, together with any specific requirements that may have been made for the student.</p> <p>Examination outcome contains the joint examiners' report and recommendation template which should be completed and agreed following the <i>viva voce</i>.</p> <p>If, following the <i>viva voce</i>, the student is required to make revisions, the student will upload their amended thesis to Thesis amendments. You will be able to access it from this tab at the appropriate time and will be emailed with a link once the student has made their submission.</p>	<div> <div>STATUS</div> <div>Pre-examination</div> </div> <div> <div>✓ Intention to submit</div> <div>Completed</div> <div>✓ Nomination of examiners</div> <div>Approved</div> <div>✓ Thesis submission</div> <div>Completed</div> <div>● Independent reports</div> <div>Waiting for independent reports</div> <div>🔒 On hold</div> <div>● Viva arrangements</div> <div>Waiting for the viva arrangements to be confirmed</div> <div>Chair's report</div> <div>Examination outcome</div> <div>Thesis amendments</div> <div>Final thesis submission</div> </div>
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Viva voce arrangements

When the date, time and location of the *viva voce* has been agreed, you will receive an email notification confirming the arrangements together with a link to submit your independent report. An example of this email is to the right of this page.

The email will contain a link to the student's thesis which you can download and a link to the independent report template which should be submitted not less than **5 working days** in advance of the date of the *viva voce*.

Candidate [REDACTED]
Degree: Doctor of Philosophy
Title of thesis: Development of computational techniques to model therapeutically relevant peptides
Internal Examiner [REDACTED]
External Examiner [REDACTED]
The thesis to be examined can be located [here](#).
Main/Co-ordinating [REDACTED]
The viva voce details are as follows:
Date of viva voce examination: 15 Dec 2022
Time: 14:00
Location: University of Southampton, Highfield Campus, Building 4, Room 2005
The examiners should complete their independent reports on PGR Manager **no less than 5 working days** before the date of the viva voce.
Deadline for submission of independent report: 10 Dec 2022

Submit independent report

Approving tasks

You will be asked to review and approve at least one (and usually two) task(s). These are:

- Examiners Joint Report and Recommendations
- Modest amendments

When you are required to review and approve these tasks you will receive an email notification from PGR Manager. The email will contain a link to the page as displayed above and you should navigate to the relevant section. Alternatively, you can log into PGR Manager where a task will be displayed in the top ribbon which, when selected, will take you to the relevant task for completion.

Once the joint report has been completed by the internal examiner you will receive an automatic notification from PGR Manager with a link to the Joint Report. An example image is provided to the right of this page.

When you click the 'Progress' link you will be taken to the joint report. Please note that 'Progress' is not an indication of the outcome of the examination, instead it enables you to move to the next screen.

The screenshot shows the University of Southampton logo at the top. Below it, the text reads "Examination outcome: Examination - Mr [REDACTED]". Underneath this, it says "Waiting for examination outcome confirmation". At the bottom, there is a blue button labeled "Progress".

When you have accessed the joint report page you should select the 'progress' button. You will be provided with guidance and the joint report that has been completed by the internal examiner.

- **Agree**
Agree with examiner's report
- **Disagree**
Disagree with examiner's report
- **Return to internal examiner**
Return the report to the internal examiner

Once you have reviewed the report and are ready to move on, you should select 'continue' and then select your decision. If you agree with the content of the report please select 'agree'. You will then be prompted to add any additional commentary to the report.

If you consider that there is an error or inaccuracy contained within the report you can select 'return to internal examiner', adding your notes to explain what, in your view, needs amendment. The internal examiner can then amend the report and return it to you for agreement. Once you select 'agree', the report will be submitted to the Faculty Director of the Graduate School and communication of the outcome to the student.

The screenshot shows two sections. The first section is titled "STATUS" and contains the text "Waiting for examination outcome confirmation". The second section is titled "CURRENTLY WITH" and contains the name "Adam Smith". Below this, there are two buttons: "Progress" (green) and "Return to internal examiner" (orange). The third section is titled "EXAMINATION" and contains the text "Examination report". At the bottom, there is a button labeled "Download printable PDF...".

The process outline above will be mirrored in circumstances when the student has been required to make amendments to their thesis.

Head of Doctoral College Administration
February 2023