

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH WALES

PRIFYSGOL DE CYMRU

***CODE OF PRACTICE FOR EXAMINERS OF
RESEARCH DEGREES***

October 2015

<http://gro.southwales.ac.uk>

Preface

The aim of this guide is to define your role as an examiner for a research award at the University of South Wales. It incorporates the relevant sections of the University's current *Research Degree Regulations*, but if you would like to have a *full* copy of the regulations, please contact the University's Graduate Research Office or you can access the document electronically <http://gro.southwales.ac.uk>

General

Your role as examiner for a research degree is extremely important and broadly covers the following points or tasks:

- to consider the submission in depth and examine the candidate accordingly
- to establish that the research carried out is appropriate for the award and is of a standard that would normally meet the requirements of a University in the United Kingdom for such an award
- to establish that the candidate is able to plan and execute a substantial piece of research in their chosen field, and to interpret and report the results of their study
- to establish that the candidate has a deep understanding of the topic of the submission and that the work is embedded in an appropriate general understanding of its wider context
- to assure yourself that the candidate has satisfied the requirements of any specific programme of study
- to assure yourself that the candidate possesses the professional competencies appropriate to a practitioner in the field.

The appointment of examiners

Examiners are appointed in advance of the thesis being submitted. A candidate's Director of Studies will submit to the Research Programmes Sub Committee a proposal for the appointment of examiners about four months before the candidate expects to submit the completed thesis. The name of a proposed Independent Chair for the oral examination should also be included on the form for the appointment of examiners.

The candidate's Director of Studies will act as your contact person and will fully inform you of the membership of the examining team. Although it is the responsibility of the Director of Studies and the supervision team to propose the examiners, it is expected that the candidate will have been consulted and her/his views noted.

If you have been appointed as an internal examiner, you may be either a member of staff of the University, an Emeritus Professor or Visiting Scholar to the University, or a member of staff of the candidate's collaborating establishment. In all cases you will be independent of the candidate and the project.

If you have been appointed as an external examiner you will be an expert in the field and will possess specialist knowledge in the particular area of the candidate's project. The examination team will normally have substantial examining experience at the level of the award being considered (i.e. examined 3 or more research degrees at the level of the examination). The internal examiner will have some knowledge in the field but may be somewhat less 'expert' than, or have complementary expertise to, the external examiner.

In some highly specialist subject areas, it may be expected that the external examiner and the candidate will have had some contact, for example, given papers at the same conference. This, of course, will not have precluded your appointment as external examiner but it is expected that you and the candidate will be wholly independent of each other. If you have had any connections with the candidate or her/his supervisors/adviser that you consider would make it desirable for the University to reconsider the appropriateness of your appointment, you should inform the Secretary of the Research Programmes Sub Committee. These connections could be either personal or professional. It is considered, for example, that an examiner, whether internal or external, who has played a significant part in advising the candidate is inappropriate and particularly so where the collaboration has led to the publishing of joint papers by the candidate and the examiner. It is stressed that it is accepted that examiners will usually be known to the supervisor, and sometimes the candidate, and that this in itself is not a bar to acting as an examiner.

In addition, external examiners may **not** normally be either a supervisor or adviser of another candidate at the University of South Wales or be an **examiner for a taught course** at the University.

The University's Research Programmes Sub Committee will also ensure that external examiners are not approved so frequently that familiarity with the department(s) prejudices objective judgement. This means that an individual external examiner will not normally be appointed more than twice in any five year period.

If you are an external examiner you should not expect to be contacted by the candidate regarding **any** aspect of the examination. Should this happen, you are requested to contact the Secretary or Chair of the Research Programmes Sub Committee as soon as possible. If you are an internal examiner it is unreasonable to expect that the candidate will avoid meeting you (particularly if they are full-time) but it is envisaged that you will use your discretion as to what is an appropriate topic for discussion.

The examination

Please also refer to the extract from the University's *Research Degree Regulations* which appears at the end of this section.

The candidate's Director of Studies will normally act as the contact person and will liaise with all examiners and the candidate to find a mutually convenient time and location for the *viva voce* (or approved alternative form of examination). Examinations are normally held at the University, but in special cases the Research Programmes Sub Committee may give approval for the examination to take place by video-conferencing.

A copy of the candidate's thesis will be forwarded to you by the Secretary of the Research Programmes Sub Committee. It will be accompanied by a 'Preliminary Report form (R8). All examiners are required to prepare this independent report on the written submission before discussing it with each other or any member of the

candidate's supervision team or department. This is to ensure that a formal record exists of each examiner's independent views on the work. Your report should be sent or emailed to the Secretary of the Committee **at least 10 days before the oral examination.**

It is possible that persons other than the candidate and the examiners may attend the examination, for example, the candidate's Director of Studies, the Chair or Secretary of the Research Programmes Sub Committee, but only where the candidate is in agreement. These persons will take no part in the examination itself. All those present will usually be asked to leave the room prior to your deliberations on the outcome of the examination.

First examination

The University will appoint an independent person to chair the oral examination to ensure the assessment process is rigorous, fair, reliable and consistent. The Chair must be independent of the student's programme of study and should normally be a senior academic who has substantial experience of examining research degrees. The Chair must have a clear understanding of the University's regulations and procedures.

On the day of the examination, if you (the team of examiners) are in any doubt over a regulatory matter and would like assistance, you may ask to meet with the Secretary of the Research Programmes Sub Committee.

Extract from the Research Programmes Regulations:

12 First examination

In this section the term 'Thesis' refers to either to the thesis or to an alternative form of submission.

For research degrees it is one of the duties of the examination team to determine that the work presented is the candidate's own. Should there be any suspicion of unfair practice, then the examiners may request that the thesis is submitted through plagiarism detection software. Alternatively, they may seek to explore these issues during the viva voce examination.

Should a case of unfair practice be demonstrated, examiners will refer to the University's Academic Integrity Regulations and associated penalties table for academic infringements:

<http://uso.southwales.ac.uk/StudentCasework/AI/>.

The submission will be deemed not to have met the standards for the awarding of the degree and examiners will consider the range of available outcomes according to the extent and seriousness of the infringement.

12.1 *Each examiner shall read and examine the thesis and submit, on the appropriate form, an independent preliminary report to the Secretary of the Research Programmes Sub Committee before any oral or alternative form of examination is held. In completing the preliminary report, each examiner shall consider whether the thesis provisionally satisfies the requirements of the award and where possible make an appropriate provisional recommendation subject to the outcome of any oral examination.*

12.1.1 *The University will appoint an independent person to chair the oral examination to ensure the assessment process is rigorous, fair, reliable and consistent. The Chair must be independent of the student's programme of study and should normally be a senior academic who has substantial experience of examining research degrees at or above the level of the examination to be chaired, i.e. MPhil for MPhil and PhD for PhD oral examinations. The Chair must have a clear understanding of the university's regulations and procedures. The examiners will have the responsibility of making any academic decisions about the candidate.*

12.2 *Where the examiners are of the opinion that the thesis is so unsatisfactory that no useful purpose would be served by conducting an oral examination, they may recommend that the Research Programmes Sub Committee dispense with the oral examination and refer the thesis for further work. In such cases the examiners shall provide the Research Programmes Sub Committee with written guidance for the candidate concerning the deficiencies of the thesis. The examiners shall not recommend that a candidate fail outright (see sub-paragraph 12.5d) without holding an oral examination or other alternative examination (see paragraph 8.3). In the case of a PhD by publication the examiners may recommend that further or alternative publications are necessary before the oral examination takes place.*

12.3 *Following the oral examination the examiners shall, where they are in agreement, submit; on the appropriate form a joint report and recommendation relating to the award to the Secretary of the Research Programmes Sub Committee. The preliminary reports and joint recommendation of the examiners shall together provide sufficiently detailed comments on the scope and quality of the work to enable the Research Programmes Sub Committee to satisfy itself that the recommendation chosen in paragraph 12.5 is correct.*

Where the examiners are not in agreement, separate reports and recommendations shall be submitted. The recommendations shall be made on the appropriate form.

- 12.4 *The examiners may request a further examination in addition to the oral examination. In such cases the approval of the Research Programmes Sub Group shall be sought without delay. Where such an examination is arranged following an oral examination, it shall normally be held within two calendar months of the oral examination unless the Research Programmes Sub Committee permits otherwise. Any such examination shall be deemed to be part of the candidate's first examination.*
- 12.5 *Following the completion of the examination the examiners may recommend* that:*
- a) *the candidate is awarded the degree;*
 - b) *the candidate is awarded the degree subject to amendments and corrections being made to the thesis within a period of up to six months* (see paragraph 12.6);*
 - c) *the candidate is permitted to re-submit for the degree and be re-examined, with or without an oral examination (see section 13 of the USW Research Degree Regulations);*
 - d) *the candidate be not awarded the degree and be not permitted to be re-examined (see paragraphs 12.2 and 12.9);*
 - e) *the candidate is offered a lower award subject subject to the presentation of the thesis amended to the satisfaction of the examiners;*
 - f) *the candidate is permitted to resubmit for a lower award and be re-examined, with or without an oral examination (see section 13 of the USW Research Degree Regulations)*
- 12.6 *Where the examiners are satisfied that the candidate has in general reached the standard required for the award, but consider that the candidate's thesis requires some amendments and corrections not so substantial as to call for the submission of a revised thesis, and recommend that the award be conferred subject to the candidate amending the thesis to the satisfaction of the internal and/or the external examiner(s) (see sub-paragraph 12.5b), they shall indicate to the candidate in writing what amendments and corrections are required.*

** Examiners may indicate informally their recommendation on the result of the examination to the candidate but they shall make it clear that the decision rests with the Research Programmes Sub Committee.*

- 12.7 *Where the examiners' final recommendations are not unanimous, the Research Programmes Sub Committee may:*
- a) *accept a majority recommendation (provided that the majority recommendation includes at least one external examiner);*
 - b) *accept the recommendation of the external examiner; or*
 - c) *require the appointment of an additional external examiner.*
- 12.8 *Where an additional external examiner is appointed under subparagraph 12.7c, she/he shall prepare an independent preliminary report on the basis of the thesis and, if considered necessary, may conduct a further oral examination. That examiner should not be informed of the recommendations of the other examiners. On receipt of the report from the additional examiner the Research Programmes Sub Group shall complete the examination as set out in paragraph 8.6.*
- 12.9 *Where the Research Programmes Sub Committee decides that the award be not conferred, the examiners shall prepare an agreed statement of the deficiencies of the thesis and the reason for their recommendation, which shall be forwarded to the candidate by the Secretary to Research Programmes Sub Committee*

After the examination

Your recommendation:

When you have explored with the candidate all issues arising from the submission and, if appropriate, the wider issues relating to the subject matter and you deem the examination to be complete, you should then ask the candidate if she/he feels they have been offered sufficient opportunity to defend their work, and respond accordingly.

When the oral examination is over, the candidate will leave the room in order for you to discuss your recommendation. Others present may, if you wish, be asked to leave the room. When you have made your recommendation you will, informally, indicate the result to the candidate but should ensure that she/he understands that the recommendation needs to be ratified by the Research Programmes Sub Committee before the decision is final.

If all examiners are in agreement you should then jointly complete the **R9** 'Recommendation of the examiners form' and select the most appropriate of the recommendations shown in the extract from the University's regulations (above). The Chair will ensure that the form is passed promptly to the Secretary of the Research Programmes Sub Committee, together with your travelling expenses claim form (if appropriate).

If you cannot reach a joint recommendation, separate 'Recommendation of the examiners' forms should be submitted by each of you **within 10 working days of the oral examination**.

Occasionally examiners are unclear whether the revisions they feel are necessary to a thesis are so great that the candidate should be recommended to 'resubmit for the degree' or whether they constitute 'amendments'. Which recommendation you make is, of course, at your discretion but, 'amendments' are to be completed within a minimum of **one month** and up to a maximum of **six months**.

If your final recommendation is that the candidate makes amendments to the thesis prior to being awarded the degree, you will normally be required to indicate to the candidate in writing what amendments and corrections are required. Similarly, if you decide that the appropriate recommendation is that the candidate be permitted to re-submit for the degree, then you will also be asked to provide the candidate, through the Research Programmes Sub Committee, with written guidance on the deficiencies of the submission. There is no recommended word-length on the written guidance, but the University appreciates the assistance offered to candidates in this position, whilst recognising that examiners are not expected to act as advisers. The Research Programmes Sub Committee recommends that examiners work together to produce this document and that it should reach the candidate **no later than 28 days after the oral examination**.

Your reports:

Your recommendations will be considered by the Research Programmes Sub Committee at its next meeting following the examination. If you have made a unanimous recommendation then the Research Programmes Sub Committee will accept it and advise the candidate as appropriate. If you have been unable to make a unanimous recommendation then the Research Programmes Sub Committee will take one of the actions outlined in section 12.7 a to c (above).

Your fee:

All external examiners are paid the fee recommended by the Research Programmes Sub Committee, and as soon as your final report is received the Secretary will authorise the Finance Department to forward it to you.

Examining for the award of PhD by Publication

Generally, examining for the award of PhD by Publication should follow the principles set out at the beginning of this handbook. Your aim will be to determine whether the publications submitted clearly demonstrate that the candidate has undertaken study and research at least comparable with that required to prepare a 'traditional' PhD thesis.

The publications must show that the candidate has personally made a systematic study, that she/he has demonstrated significant critical powers and made an

independent and original contribution to knowledge. Collectively, the publications and the candidate's critical overview must display coherence and development.

In the case of this award, the Secretary of the Research Programmes Sub Committee will send you, in addition to the body of published work, the candidate's application to register for the award where she/he has indicated their individual contribution to any co-authored publications. Supporting statements by the co-authors will also be forwarded to you.

Candidates registered on this route to PhD will undergo an oral examination in the same way as 'traditional' PhD candidates but the recommendations available to you are as follows:

- a the candidate be awarded the PhD;
- b the candidate be awarded the PhD subject to amendments being made to the critical overview;
- c the candidate be permitted to re-submit for the PhD and be re-examined, with or without an oral examination;
- d the candidate be not awarded the PhD and be not permitted to be re-examined;
- e the candidate is offered the degree of MPhil subject to the presentation of the submission amended to the satisfaction of the examiners;
- f the candidate is permitted to resubmit for the award of MPhil and be re-examined with or without an oral examination

Recommendation 'c' (above) should be used where the candidate's submission is deemed to require further or alternative publications before the PhD can be awarded. If this factor is identified before the *viva voce* examination takes place then you may recommend, by letter to the Secretary of the Research Programmes Sub Committee, that the examination is postponed until the submission is revised.

The University of South Wales does **not** allow candidates to register for an award of MPhil by Publication.

However, in very exceptional circumstances you, the team of examiners, may wish to recommend 'e' or 'f' (above). You will be asked, on the recommendation form, to indicate the exceptional grounds on which your recommendation is being made.

Examining for the award of PhD by Portfolio

The PhD or MPhil by Portfolio involves the submission for examination of an approved portfolio of material relating to a maximum of three projects accompanied by an overview.

Similarly, certain submissions for PhD by Thesis may contain up to three distinct but related projects. Such submissions should be examined in accordance with the same principles as the traditional PhD by Thesis. In particular, the projects should collectively represent an independent and original contribution to knowledge.

Definition of ‘amendments’ guidance for examiners

Amendments are defined both by the nature of the work to be carried out on the thesis and the timescale within which such completion is thought reasonable.

1) Nature of the work

Amendments should **NOT** involve any of the following:

- a) a major re-think of methodology employed in the project, nor
- b) a major recasting of whole sections/chapters of the thesis (or original composition)
- c) re-running of experiments, fieldwork or other methods of data collection
- d) conducting new experiments, fieldwork or other methods of data collection

Typically, amendments entail improvements to the satisfaction of the examiners in:

- i) the presentation of the thesis (spelling, punctuation, syntax)
- ii) correction of minor errors of fact or interpretation
- iii) minor re-writing to make the context, focus or originality of the thesis clearer to the reader (this may include suggested revision of the thesis title by the examiners)
- iv) integration of graphic/statistical material into relevant parts of the text
- v) bibliography and references
- vi) minor re-organisation of material within or between sections/chapters for easier comprehension by the reader (including more effective cross-referencing)
- vii) clarification of particular points or of terminology employed

2) Timescale

Amendments should be completed within a period of between **one month** and **six months** and this should be specified by the examiners at the time of the oral examination. Examiners will discuss this with the candidate first and should exercise their judgement where exceptional circumstances prevail. The decision should be recorded on the R9.

The Chair will also record this decision on the Checklist of the Oral Examination.

The Chair will ensure everyone is clear on the outcome and what needs to be done/agreed at the time of the viva (if amendments).

Further Information:

The Secretary to Research Programmes Sub Committee, Dr Elaine Huntley is available to give guidance on the role of examiner or any aspect of the viva voce examination. Please telephone 01443 482881 or email elaine.huntley@southwales.ac.uk if you require further information.