

Guidelines for Postgraduate Research Student Vivas

– Role of the Internal Examiner



The following guidelines are intended to make clear the role of the Internal Examiner and the responsibilities required. It should be noted that, in addition to these administrative responsibilities, the Internal Examiner plays a full academic role in the viva.

General

During a research viva, it is the responsibility of the Internal Examiner to have a clear understanding of the University's academic regulations and procedures and conduct the viva in order to ensure that:

- (a) the research assessment process is rigorous, fair, reliable and consistent;
- (b) the student has had opportunity to defend the thesis by ensuring that the candidate has the opportunity to respond to all questions;
- (c) the questioning is not unduly aggressive or confrontational or otherwise inappropriate;
- (d) that the University's academic regulations and procedures are adhered to;
- (e) the external examiner(s) and the candidate can be advised of the academic regulations if required;
- (f) the individual examiners reports are completed **prior** to the viva;
- (g) the recommendations are communicated to the candidate and the final joint report completed following the viva and sent to the relevant School Postgraduate Research Office;
- (h) any actions resulting from the viva are clear and understood by all parties; and
- (i) all forms are **type written** **NOT** completed by hand.

1) **Before to the Viva**

The Internal Examiner will be responsible for:

- (a) liaising with other members of the examining team in order to establish a mutually convenient date, time and venue for the viva;
- (b) ensuring the external examiner is eligible to work in the UK before holding a viva in the UK;
- (c) liaising with the external examiner to ensure that they provide a completed New Staff Details form along with original identification documentation, a copy of which must be signed and dated by a Heriot-Watt member of staff (see New Staff Details form, Note B for approved formats);
- (d) where the viva is not taking place in the UK, ensure the External Examiner has the appropriate permissions to work in the location of the viva;
- (e) communicating information on the date, time and venue of the viva to all other members of the examining team and student;
- (f) advising the candidate that he/she has given approval for any member(s) of the supervisory team to attend the viva;
- (g) ensuring that the external examiner(s) is aware of Heriot-Watt University thesis examination procedures.

The relevant Student Service Centre will be responsible for sending copies of the thesis and ensuring that examiners can locate appropriate information/reports from the website (<https://www.hw.ac.uk/students/studies/examinations/thesis-examination.htm>). This includes:

- Appropriate Academic Regulations
- Guidelines on the Submission and Format of Thesis
- Handbook on Examining for Research Degrees
- Internal Examiner's Report Form
- Individual Examiner's Report Form
- Joint Examiner's Report Form
- Internal Examiner Declaration Form
- New Staff Details Form (including ID check information)
- Expenses Claim Form
- Guidelines on Expenses

2) **At the Start of the Viva**

The Internal Examiner should:

- (a) explain the status and role of the Examiners during the viva, and the reason for taking notes;
- (b) ensure that any procedural questions the Examiners have are discussed and resolved prior to the start of the viva; this may include a discussion on how exactly the thesis will be examined (for example whether the External Examiner is content to lead the proceedings or whether this should be carried out by the Examiners taking turns or chapter-by-chapter analysis, etc);
- (c) ensure that the candidate is introduced to each member of the examining team before questioning begins;
- (d) establish an atmosphere in which the candidate will be able to perform to the best of his/her ability;
- (e) make it clear that any member(s) of the supervisory team attending the viva do so as observers only, and that they may not take part in either the viva (unless invited by the examiners to clarify specific points) nor in the evaluation of the thesis after the viva;
- (f) ensure that the candidate is advised that no information on the outcome of the viva will be given before the end of the viva and that he/she should not infer any decision from the questions and discussion;

3) **During the Viva**

The Internal Examiner should:

- (a) ensure that the examining process is rigorous, fair, reliable and consistent;
- (b) take notes, e.g. on the overall conduct of the viva (including areas/questions which the candidate has difficulty with, and the ways in which the candidate deals with such difficulties); these notes should be returned to the relevant School Postgraduate Research Office with the Joint Examiners' Recommendation Form;
- (c) make a full contribution to the viva of the thesis and to the academic evaluation of the thesis;
- (d) offer the candidate and members of the examining team the opportunity for a brief break when appropriate.

4) **After the Viva**

The Internal Examiner:

- (a) will request that any member(s) of the supervisory team to leave the room during the Examiners' discussion (although they may accompany the candidate for any final feedback session the Examiners wish to provide);
- (b) will ensure that the examiners' recommendations comply with University academic regulations;
- (c) will ensure that any recommended revisions or amendments are clearly stated indicating the scale and the scope of the changes and that these are communicated to the candidate, in writing, within 2 weeks of the viva;
- (d) may communicate informally the recommendations of the examiners to the candidate, in accordance with University academic regulations and explain that the formal recommendation will be given following final approval by the Research Degrees Committee, acting on behalf of the Senate;
- (e) will ensure that the External Examiner has completed the New Staff Details form and provided original identification documentation, a copy of which must be signed and dated by a Heriot-Watt member of staff (see New Staff Details form, Note B for approved formats) is sent to the relevant School Postgraduate Research Office, along with a copy of the visa stamp page if applicable;
- (f) where the External Examiner is not eligible to work in the UK, they may be able to carry out external examiner duties through the Permitted Paid Engagement Visa route. Some nationalities will not need to apply for this visa, but we will need to see evidence of this (a print out of the relevant pages of the website) must be provided when they present their passport;
- (g) will ensure that the expenses forms and the joint recommendation form are completed and sent to the relevant School Postgraduate Research Office as soon as possible;
- (h) the Internal Examiner will have sight of the Final Bound thesis prior to completion of the Internal Examiners Declaration form.

5) **Submission of a Corrected Thesis**

The Internal Examiner will:

- (a) for cases where only minor corrections are required (Category B - award degree following satisfactory completion of minor corrections to the satisfaction of the Internal Examiner), verify that these changes have been satisfactorily carried out and complete the appropriate form;
- (b) for cases of re-submission (Category C - re-submit after further work for consideration of the External Examiner without a further viva), ensure all Examiners submit new reports (Individual Examiner's Report Forms and Examiners' Joint Recommendation Form);
- (c) for cases of re-submission (Category D - re-submit after further work for consideration of the External Examiner with a further viva), ensure all Examiners submit new reports (Individual Examiner's Report Forms and Examiners' Joint Recommendation Form);
- (d) ensure that the electronic version of the thesis is an exact copy of the Final Bound copy.

At the end of the examination process, the Internal Examiner may, if appropriate, communicate the recommendations to the candidate's relevant School Postgraduate Research Office.

It is important to note that, in the event of a review of an examination decision, the Internal Examiner may be approached by the review panel for further information.