

MATHEMATICAL, PHYSICAL AND LIFE SCIENCES DIVISION GRADUATE SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Publication of guidance notes on the 'Role of the Internal Examiner' and 'Points to Consider in Appointing Examiners for PGR Examinations'

These notes are based primarily on Education Committee or Examination School documents, supplemented where indicated by divisional procedures.

(1) Role of the Internal Examiner

The role of the examiners for research degrees is set out in the Examination Regulations; Education Committee's [Policy and Guidance on Research Degrees](#) (section 7), and in the *Memorandum for Examiners for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy* and the *Memorandum for Examiners for the Degree of MSc by Research* (issued to examiners with their invitation and with the candidates thesis)

The MPLS Division has supplemented this information with some particular guidance on the role of the internal examiner, within this overall framework. This is set out below.

Before the viva

- To liaise with the external examiner and candidate to find a convenient date for the oral examination, and to notify all parties of the arrangements made.
- To assist with accommodation arrangements for the external examiner if required.
- To book a room for the viva.
- To give public notice of the viva (using the viva notice form - GSO.9 sent to the internal examiner with the students thesis). **Note:** If the deadline for the Gazette has been missed a notice must be placed at the Examination Schools by notifying the research degree examinations team (researchdegrees@admin.ox.ac.uk), and a notice must also be placed at the place where the viva is to take place. If a viva takes place without any advertised notice, the internal examiner must write to the Proctors to request that the examination be retrospectively approved.

Note: Coronavirus (COVID-19): Education Policy advice: The requirement to publish notification of a PGR viva in the Gazette is suspended for remote vivas. However, the Research Degrees Office still requires information on upcoming agreed viva dates, in order to ensure records are kept up to date and to assist with queries from candidates and administrators. PGR internal examiners should therefore ensure that the [Research Degrees Office](#) is informed in advance of agreed viva dates.

- If in exceptional circumstances, it is necessary for the viva to be held outside of Oxford, it is the responsibility of the internal examiner to obtain approval via the Director of Graduate Studies for the students department.
- To brief the external examiner on the examination process at Oxford, in particular to brief new external examiners.

Examiners should note the expectation that the examination will be conducted in a manner which is independent of the supervisor. Discussion of the thesis or candidate should be avoided except as prescribed by the *Memorandum for Examiners for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy* and the *Memorandum for Examiners for the Degree of MSc by Research*.

Following the viva:

- To contribute to, and to submit, the examiners joint report to the MPLS Graduate Office within 2 weeks of the viva (**only** if minor corrections have **not** been requested, or the recommendation is for major corrections or reference back).
- If minor corrections have been requested, to:
 - i. provide the candidate with a list of required corrections either at the viva, or within in 2 weeks of the viva.
 - ii. submit the notice of minor corrections slip to the MPLS Graduate Office within 2 weeks of the viva, if minor corrections have been requested.
 - iii. once completed minor corrections have been seen and approved the examiners' joint report should be submitted to the MPLS Graduate Office.
- To return the thesis and abstract to the candidate following the viva, or to the Examination Schools, who will forward them to the candidate.

The examiners' joint report

Please refer to the MPLS additional notes of guidance for DPhil and MSc by Research for guidance on what information should be included in the joint report.

(2) Points to Consider in Appointing Examiners for PGR Examinations

The following notes are based on those in the Education Committee's [Policy and Guidance Notes on Research Degrees](#) (section 7.3), supplemented by Divisional guidance (underlined).

External examiner appointment:

7.3.3 Examiners

External examiners

It is an absolute requirement that one examiner should be external to the University for research examinations. The absence of specific reference to external and internal examiners in the [Examination Regulations](#) allows the responsible board to appoint two external examiners where particular circumstances suggest that this would be prudent. It is not possible to appoint more than two examiners in total.

Where two external examiners are appointed, it is best practice to appoint a member of the department/faculty to act as a point of liaison and information for the examination. This member should be an academic, so that they can guide the external examiners through University research examination processes as well as undertaking some of the routine tasks (posting notices of the examination, booking a room, finding hospitality) which would normally be undertaken by the internal examiner.

Overseas examiners

The University's policy in relation to examiners from overseas is intended to ensure that students should, as far as possible, be examined by those well qualified to do so. The University has not therefore put a formal restriction on invitations to examiners from overseas. Boards are asked to consider examiners from within the UK and Europe as a first choice, and only to look further afield if there is no one appropriately qualified from within this group, and if the quality of the student's examination would be reduced without an examiner from elsewhere. Boards or committees are asked in these circumstances to try to fit the viva around a pre-arranged visit to the UK by the proposed external examiner or to consider granting permission for the examiner to attend remotely via video call (see section 7.3.4 and Annexes D and E).

Internal examiner appointment:

Examiners act on behalf of the body which appoints them, and there is no restriction on who may act as an examiner if they are considered suitable by a board/committee, bearing in mind conflicts of interest. It is not necessary to hold a permanent post to act as an internal examiner, but it is important that the internal examiner should have expertise in the subject of the student's thesis, should understand the procedures which operate in Oxford, and have a clear sense of the expectations and standards associated with a successful Oxford doctoral thesis.

A person who has not acted as an internal examiner for a research degree examination at Oxford before should consult and seek guidance from the Director of Graduate Studies or his/her deputy (e.g. when the Director of Graduate Studies is also the student's supervisor). They could be invited to shadow an examination at Oxford before being appointed as an internal examiner.

