

Important Information for Examiners in the Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences Division Additional Notes of Guidance for D.Phil. and M.Sc. by Research

The Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences Division would be grateful if examiners observe the following additions to the standard instructions contained in the University's 'Memorandum for Examiners for D.Phil. or M.Sc. by Research'.

1. The thesis

The examiners must consider only the copy of the thesis issued to them by the University's Research Degrees Examinations Office (RDEO) for the oral examination. Under no circumstances can the examiners use a copy of the thesis, electronic or otherwise, supplied directly by the candidate or supervisor. Special permission must be sought from the Proctors for electronic copies of the thesis to be used, and if granted these must be sent out by the RDEO.

2. Early vivas

Examiners should expect to be in possession of the thesis for a minimum of four weeks prior to the viva date. If a viva earlier than this date has been requested for exceptional reasons, and both examiners are willing to conduct it, the internal examiner must seek permission from the Proctors.

3. Timetable for examination and report

Examiners are normally expected to complete the examination and submit their joint report within three months of receipt of the thesis.

No corrections required

- if the thesis is entirely satisfactory and no corrections are required, the joint examiners' report should be sent to the MPLS Graduate Office, 9 Parks Road, no later than one month from the date of the viva, **and ideally within two weeks** of the date of the viva. A reminder to return the report may be sent two weeks from the date of the viva.

Minor corrections

- the examiners' requirements should be reported to the student at the viva or, at the latest, within **two weeks** of the viva taking place;
- the notice of minor corrections should be sent to the MPLS Graduate Office as soon as the corrections have been provided to the student either at/or following the viva;
- the candidate is permitted **one month** to complete minor corrections, and may apply for one further extension of one month if extra time is needed;
- on receipt of the completed minor corrections, examiners should aim to submit their joint report to the MPLS Graduate Office within **one month**.

Major corrections

- the examiners should send their joint preliminary report to the MPLS Graduate Office no later than one month from the date of the viva, **and ideally within two weeks** of the date of the viva. Examiners should **not** provide the candidate with a copy of the report or required corrections.

Reference back, or recommending the award of a lower degree

- the examiners should send their joint report to the MPLS Graduate Office no later than one month from the date of the viva, **and ideally within two weeks** of the date of the viva. Examiners should **not** provide the candidate with a copy of the report or required revisions.

4. Guidance on examination outcomes

Examiners with any doubt as to the appropriateness of minor corrections as against major corrections, or major corrections as against reference back should feel free to consult the relevant Director of Graduate Studies, Graduate Studies Officer or Graduate Studies Assistant, if this would be helpful.

On examining the candidate if the examiners are clear that the candidate does not possess a good general knowledge in their field of learning and are not at the standard necessary of a DPhil, then a further viva must be held when the revised thesis is submitted, to allow the examiners to determine this.

When selecting the appropriate recommendation on the GSO.11 report form (or GSO.12 for MSc by Research examinations), examiners should ensure that their joint report clearly sets out what the candidate is required to do for all the options that are being offered to them, for example, if the examiners select option 2b) on the GSO.11 report form, 'reference back for the D.Phil. or award of M.Litt./M.Sc. subject to minor corrections', the examiners' should outline in the report what the candidate is required to do to resubmit for the DPhil, as well as specifying what corrections the candidate would be required to do if s/he decided to accept a lower award subject to minor corrections.

Outcomes:

a) Minor corrections

Minor corrections should normally cover typographical errors, spelling mistakes, incomplete or inconsistent references or equations, and factual mistakes. It may include very limited rewriting of the introduction and/or conclusion to clarify the aims, scope or findings of the thesis. Such corrections should not affect the substance of an argument or a conclusion in the thesis, and they should not indicate a candidate's lack of grasp of the regular procedures for presenting research in his or her subject. Examiners must provide a list of corrections to the candidate within two weeks of the oral examination. The candidate is allowed one month to make these corrections, and may apply for an extension of one month if extra time is needed. It normally requires only one examiner (usually the internal) to approve 'minor corrections'. The joint report must **not** be submitted to the Graduate Office until the corrections have been satisfactorily completed and checked. The internal examiner should complete the relevant section on the examiners' report form to confirm that these have been completed. Examiners should also include a statement at the end of their report to confirm that these have been made to their satisfaction.

b) Major corrections

Major corrections should not alter the substance/outcome or conclusion of the thesis. It should not involve the student doing any substantial research and/or experimental work to accommodate these changes. For example, candidates should not be asked to conduct any major experiments under these corrections. However, they may be asked to repeat an experiment to correct an error. Major corrections may involve some re-writing or re-working of the thesis i.e. revision of one or more chapters. The candidate is allowed six months (from the point at which the candidate receives the list of major corrections) to make these changes, and may apply for an extension of up to three months if extra time is needed. Examiners will need to submit a preliminary report to the board with a detailed description of the major corrections required. If the recommendation is approved by the board, both examiners will be required to review the revised thesis. Examiners should **not** provide the candidate with a copy of the report or required corrections. The student and supervisor will be sent a copy of these once the recommendation has been approved by the Board.

c) Reference back

Where corrections of a more significant nature are required, for example where the student is required to carry out new research/experimental work that might alter the arguments or

conclusions, then it is necessary to refer the thesis back for re-examination. Such revisions should be reassessed by both examiners appointed by the Board (normally the original). A formal statement of the deficiencies in the thesis should be attached to the report submitted to the Division. ***This statement should not be communicated directly to the candidate (or his/her supervisor)***. The Division takes a considerable interest in the wording of the statements of deficiencies. On occasion it asks examiners to expand or clarify certain points before the statement is formally transmitted to the student with the Division's decision on his/her candidature. Difficulties can sometimes occur on resubmission, and if there is a dispute it is important for the Division to know exactly what corrections the examiners have requested. Moreover, it is equally important for any new examiner to know what his/her predecessor required, in the event that the latter does not serve in this capacity for the resubmission, as can happen from time to time.

In referring back a thesis for re-examination examiners are asked to indicate broadly the amount of time they would expect it to take a candidate working full-time to make the corrections to bring the thesis up to an acceptable standard. In making referrals, examiners should take into account the likely availability of facilities in departments to enable candidates to continue their research or repeat experiments. It is important not to pre-empt the report on a resubmitted thesis by indicating in the report that a second viva may not be necessary. In the event of a second referral, the regulations are clear that a second viva is mandatory.

Examination Regulations- <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/examregs/2014-15/grftdodoctofphil/>.

Resubmission of thesis

On resubmission of the thesis, students should submit a separate report indicating the specific changes made. For students in the MPLS Division the word limit for the accompanying report shall be 2000 words.

5. The examiners' joint report

It should be noted that in the MPLS Division the D.Phil. and M.Sc. examiners reports are sent for approval to the Director of Graduate Studies of the relevant department or sub-department, and then to the Director of the Graduate School for approval on behalf of the Divisional Board. The purpose of divisional scrutiny is not to question or overturn the academic judgment of the examiners, but primarily to confirm that the examiners have provided a sufficient justification for their recommendation, and to check if there are any points in the report which might indicate some concern about the department's provision of doctoral training which the Division should raise with the appropriate Director of Graduate Studies. This final approval step is essential for quality assurance purposes. The report should therefore provide sufficient information to enable both the relevant Director of Graduate Studies and the Director of the Graduate School to understand the basis for the examiners' recommendation. Reports that do not meet this requirement may be returned to the examiners for amplification, leading to inevitable delays in granting the candidate leave to supplicate.

i) Presentation of reports

All reports should be typed and not hand written, and printed in a legible font size (e.g Arial 11 point).

Lists of minor or major corrections should be attached as an appendix to the report.

ii) Length of report

Examiners are asked to provide a reasonably full statement of the scope and content of the thesis (it is usual to give a brief summary of each chapter/section of the thesis) and to highlight the most significant outcomes of the research. The Division recognizes that the appropriate length may vary according to the subject and quality of the thesis. It welcomes the writing of concise and clear reports, but it expects that these would typically be of the order of one page in length for the case where a positive recommendation is made, and any minor corrections are straightforward. In cases where there are significant major corrections or reference back for resubmission is recommended, it is likely that a longer report will be necessary.

iii) Content of the report

As stated in the University's Memorandum of Guidance for Examiners the report should be "as far as possible expressed in terms that are intelligible to those who are not specialists in the particular field of the thesis". It should thus be written in a style that would be accessible to academics in any of the MPLS Division's departments.

The Director of the Graduate School does not generally receive a copy of the abstract of the thesis at the same time as the examiners' report. The Division does not need to see the candidate's own evaluation and summary of his/her achievements (normally aimed at the specialists) but rather the examiners' evaluation of the work.

The report will not be considered to be sufficient if it only indicates the area in which the research was conducted (e.g. "the candidate presented a thesis about the synthesis and characterization of fluorine-containing molecules"); rather the report should summarize the specific achievements of the candidate's research presented in the thesis and explain how the results and conclusions make "*a significant and substantial contribution in the particular field of learning within which the subject of the thesis falls.*" If the work is of publishable quality, or if it is known to have already been published, this should be indicated in the report.

Examiners are also asked to note that, as well as giving an informative report on the subject matter and on the strength and weaknesses of the thesis, a statement about the candidate's performance in the viva should also be included within their report. This should make clear that the examiners believe the thesis and the research reported on to be the candidate's own work, and report on whether the candidate understood its contents. The date of the viva and an estimate of the duration of the viva should be included.

Please ensure that the recommendation on the outcome of the examination is noted as clearly as possible in the written joint report, as well as on the report form GSO.11. An example of such a statement is provided below:

"We are clear that the candidate's thesis and performance in the viva meet the standard required for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy".

The statement may be enlarged upon to clarify the examiners' views, for example to indicate if the candidate's thesis and performance in the viva exceeded the standard, as the examiners consider appropriate.

Major Corrections

If major corrections are being recommended, the joint preliminary report to the board, in addition to the above, should include a detailed description of the major corrections required. The report should also include a clear statement to confirm that the corrections being requested will not alter the substance/outcome or conclusion of the thesis, and will also not involve the student doing any substantial research and/or experimental work to accommodate these changes.

- *Review of major corrections*

Following the submission of major corrections, if recommending the award of the degree, examiners are asked to submit a new report describing the revised version of the thesis, following the guidelines given in 5 (iii) above, and section 1 of the Examiner Report Content Checklist.

6. Further information

Full advice on the University's examination requirements can be found in the "Memorandum for Examiners for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy" and the "Memorandum for Examiners for the Degree of Master of Science (by Research)" which should have been sent to you by the University's Research Degrees Examinations Office. If you do not have a copy of the relevant note please contact researchdegrees@admin.ox.ac.uk.

Examiner Report Content Checklist

1. - If recommending **award of the degree** the report should include:

- the date of the viva and its approximate duration;
- an outline of the structure of the thesis;
- a statement of the scope and content of the thesis aimed at a non-specialist (this might take the form of a brief summary of each chapter or section of the thesis, including a short description of the key theoretical or experimental approaches used or developed), and how the results and conclusions make “a significant and substantial contribution in the particular field of learning within which the subject of the thesis falls” (see section 6.1(ii) in the University’s Memorandum for Examiners);
- evaluative comments on the strengths/achievements as well as of the limitations, weaknesses and omissions of the thesis;
- a statement on the candidate’s performance in the oral examination;
- comments on the candidate’s explanations for any deficiencies in the thesis;
- a statement that the examiners believe the student to be the true author of the thesis;
- comments on whether the work has been published or is of publishable quality;
- a clear statement confirming the recommendation on the outcome of the examination, supporting the recommendation on the examination report form (GSO11);

2. - For **major corrections** the joint preliminary report should include, any of the relevant points from 1 above and:

- a detailed description of the major corrections required.
- a clear statement to confirm that the corrections being requested will not alter the substance/outcome or conclusion of the thesis, and will also not involve the student doing any substantial research and/or experimental work to accommodate these changes.

Review of major corrections - Following submission of major corrections, if recommending the award of the degree, the report should include all the points from 1 above and:

- a clear statement and description of how the major corrections have now been addressed.

3. - For **reference back** the report should include, any of the relevant points from 1 above and:

- a clear statement of what is wrong with the thesis, indicating clearly and precisely how the thesis falls short of the required standard and how the candidate should revise it to remedy these defects.

On resubmission a second viva may be necessary so please do not waive the need for a second viva in the report.

Following submission of the revised thesis, if recommending the award of the degree, the report should include all the points from 1 above and:

- a clear statement and description of how the revisions requested have now been addressed.

Note: Any lists of minor or major corrections should be attached as an appendix to the report.