

**CARDIFF**  
UNIVERSITY

PRIFYSGOL  
**CAERDYDD**

**POLICY AND PROCEDURE FOR  
THE CONDUCT OF RESEARCH  
DEGREE EXAMINATIONS**

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### **Alignment with the Expectations and Core practices of the revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education**

This policy and procedure aligns with the following relevant Expectations and Core Practices of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education:

<b>Expectations for standards</b>	<b>Expectations for quality</b>
The academic standards of courses meet the requirements of the relevant national qualifications framework.	Courses are well-designed, provide a high-quality academic experience for all students and enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed.
The value of qualifications awarded to students at the point of qualification and over time is in line with sector-recognised standards.	
<b>Core practices for standards</b>	<b>Core practices for quality</b>
The provider ensures that the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualifications frameworks.	The provider has sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience.

The provider uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent.	The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience.
	Where the provider offers research degrees, it delivers these in appropriate and supportive research environments
	The provider supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes.
<b>Common practices for standards</b>	<b>Common practices for quality</b>
The provider reviews its core practices for standards regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.	The provider reviews its core practices for quality regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.
	The provider's approach to managing quality takes account of external expertise.
	The provider engages students individually and collectively in the development, assurance and enhancement of the quality of their educational experience.

## **Policy and Procedure for the Conduct of Research Degree Examinations**

### **Policy**

- 1.1 Research degrees will be assessed, in whole or part, by the examination of a thesis (or equivalent format, where permitted) and the candidate's defence of that work at an oral examination (the 'viva'). This policy and procedure applies to the examination process of the thesis.
- 1.2 Doctoral Degrees by Examination and Thesis (Professional Doctorates) will be assessed, in addition, by the examination of a taught component, in accordance with the University's assessment regulations for taught programmes.
- 1.3 The Convenor of the Examining Board has overall responsibility for the arrangement and management of the examination, and liaison between members of the Examining Board and with the candidate.
- 1.4 The Head of School will act as the Convenor or will appoint another suitably authoritative member of academic staff to the role.
- 1.5 An individual cannot act as Convenor for the examination of a supervisee. Where the Head of School (or nominee) is also the supervisor of the candidate, another member of academic staff will be appointed to the role of Convenor.
- 1.6 The Convenor may act as the Chair for the examination but may not act as the Internal Examiner.
- 1.7 As good practice, the viva should take place within 3 months of submission of the thesis. If this is not possible, all parties should be kept informed of the progress of the arrangements. The viva must be held within 12 months of submission unless there are exceptional circumstances.
- 1.8 The viva may be held on campus, with all participants attending in person, or it may take place remotely, either entirely, with all participants joining by electronic means, or in part, with one or more participants attending in person on campus, and one or more participants joining by electronic means. The Convenor must consider each proposed arrangement on a case-by-case basis, and their approval is required before the viva details are confirmed and communicated to participants (see section 2, below).
- 1.9 Where the candidate attends the viva in person, the Chair must accompany them.
- 1.10 The Chair of the Examining Board is responsible for ensuring the integrity of the viva, and its fair and proper conduct. The Chair will be conversant with this policy and procedure, the Research Degree Assessment Regulations, including the decisions available to the Examining Board, and the associated

guidance for Chairs and Examiners, in order to guide and advise the Examiners as appropriate.

- 1.11 The purpose of the viva is to:
- .1 provide assurance that the thesis is the candidate's own work;
  - .2 establish that the candidate understands the research that they have carried out and what they have written in the thesis;
  - .3 allow assessment of the candidate's ability to locate their work within the broader context of the field of research related to their project;
  - .4 give the candidate an opportunity to defend the thesis and to clarify any obscurities or weaknesses;
  - .5 enable the Examiners to explore how the thesis might be raised to the required standard should they be unable to recommend the award at this stage.
- 1.12 Examiners may also take the opportunity to discuss with the candidate their subsequent research and professional direction.

### **Procedure**

## **2. Arranging the Viva**

- 2.1 The Convenor will consider the arrangements for each viva on an individual basis, paying particular consideration to the proposed location of each participant and their means of attendance (i.e. in person or remotely).
- 2.2 The candidate and all members of the Examining Board must confirm their agreement to the planned arrangements and, where required, the choice of electronic media.
- 2.3 In determining whether or not to approve the arrangements, the Convenor should consider:
- .1 the candidate's personal circumstances, including, for example, their current location (if away from the University) and any visa restrictions or other limitations associated with a return to the University;
  - .2 the candidate's preference, which may include a strong desire to meet the Examining Board in person in order to help foster professional links or future developmental opportunities;
  - .3 any documented extenuating circumstances or agreed adjustments, which may either require on-campus support or which would be better addressed through the candidate's attendance via electronic means;

- .4 the location of the External Examiner, and both their ability and willingness to travel to the University to attend in person;
  - .5 any discipline or thesis-specific factors, which may be best accommodated by an entirely face-to-face viva (e.g. where a candidate may be required to demonstrate practically their use or understanding of specialist equipment or technical knowledge);
  - .6 the overall experience of all participants, which may be best facilitated face-to-face;
  - .7 the timeliness of the viva, where arrangements for a face-to-face viva may result in a significant delay in the examination taking place.
- 2.4 It is advised that the Convenor contacts the candidate at an early stage, before potential examiners are approached by the candidate's supervisor and the thesis is submitted, to discuss the options for the viva arrangements, since this may influence the choice of External Examiner and the timing of the examination.
- 2.5 The viva must be held in a room (or rooms) suitable for the examination: this is particularly important where sensitive data or subjects are to be discussed, and/or a mixed set-up is planned (e.g. a 'hybrid' examination, with participants attending both in person and remotely).
- 2.6 Sufficient time must be allotted for the viva, taking into account any time difference for any remote participant(s). In the case of one or more remote participants, this should include additional time before the start of the viva to allow the participants to familiarise themselves with the medium and how they will conduct the examination.
- 2.7 The Convenor will ensure that the Examiners are provided with a copy of the thesis, the paperwork they are required to complete, and the details on the timescale for its completion.
- 2.8 The Convenor will ensure that the practical arrangements for the viva are made and communicated to all participants in advance of the examination. This includes advising the candidate of any requirement to prepare a presentation for delivery in the viva.
- 2.9 The Convenor/their nominee will inform all parties (Chair, Examiners, candidate) of the other participants in the viva, and whether a supervisor will be attending.
- 2.10 Where the candidate will attend without a supervisor, it is good practice for the supervisor to remain available during and immediately after the viva to provide pastoral support to the candidate. This is particularly important if the candidate is attending remotely and/or there are known additional support needs.

### **3. The Period Leading Up to the Viva**

- 3.1 The Examiners will each be required to assess the thesis independently and submit a preliminary written report to the Convenor of the Examining Board ahead of the viva. The School will communicate the procedure and expected timescale to the Examiners.
- 3.2 The Examiners must not share their views on the thesis with each other prior to the formal exchange of independent preliminary reports that will happen in communication with the Chair, either at or shortly before the pre-viva meeting.
- 3.3 If an Examiner wishes to highlight typographical or other presentational errors for correction that they have identified when reading the thesis, these should be detailed separately from the preliminary report: they may be provided as a list or as annotations on the thesis.
- 2.8 The Examiners should not discuss their initial observations on the thesis with the candidate or their supervisor(s) in advance of the examination.
- 2.9 The Convenor will consult with the Director of Postgraduate Research to ensure that the Chair is notified of any agreed adjustments or extenuating circumstances that may affect the candidate's performance during the viva, and will advise on appropriate action.

### **4. Meeting Before the Viva**

- 4.1 Ahead of the viva, the Examiners and the Chair will meet to:
  - .1 discuss the Examiners' preliminary reports;
  - .2 identify the issues to be discussed in the examination;
  - .3 agree a broad strategy for the examination.
- 4.2 If the viva is to take place entirely via electronic means, or if one or more members of the Examining Board are to join remotely, this meeting will also provide an opportunity for the Examining Board to check that they are comfortable with the set-up and to address any potential connection issues.
- 4.3 If a supervisor has been invited to attend the viva, they will join the Examiners at the same time as the candidate, not beforehand, and they cannot participate in, or be party to, any of the Examiners' preliminary discussions.

### **5. During the Viva**

- 5.1 The Chair will introduce the candidate to the Examiners, explain the order of events, and guide the participants through the proceedings. The Chair will

remain present throughout the examination to ensure that due process is followed.

- 5.2 If the candidate is attending from an alternative location and is not personally known to the Examining Board, a member of staff (such as the supervisor) must be available at the start of the viva to confirm their identity.
- 5.3 In addition, the candidate must be able to demonstrate that they are alone (with the exception of their supervisor, if present in the same location) and that they will not be assisted in the viva.
- 5.4 Audio and visual quality must be sufficient to enable the Examining Board to assure themselves of the candidate's identity and to allow uninterrupted discussion.
- 5.5 Typically, the viva will start with the candidate being asked to deliver a brief overview of their research project, including the research questions, methodology and main outcomes. This may take the form of a presentation.
- 5.6 The viva will be allowed to run for as long as necessary for it to serve its purpose. This is typically 2-3 hours, but may be longer or shorter. The Chair will ensure that the proceedings are adjusted to take account of any agreed adjustments (e.g. by scheduling regular breaks).
- 5.7 A supervisor, if present, must be asked to withdraw before the candidate so that the candidate has an opportunity to comment on their supervision, or any aspects of their candidature, without their supervisor being present.
- 5.8 The Chair will ask the candidate to leave the room before the Examiners begin their final deliberations. At no point prior to this stage should the candidate be informed of the anticipated outcome.
- 5.9 Where an electronic medium is used, care should be taken to ensure that it is properly suspended at the appropriate time to enable the Examiners to deliberate, and that the candidate is unable to hear the Examiners' discussions.

## 6. **Completing the Viva**

- 6.1 Once the Examiners have concluded their deliberations and agreed a recommendation, the candidate (and their supervisor, if the candidate wishes) will be invited back into the room and informed of the outcome by the Chair.
- 6.2 Where an Examiner has made notes of minor errors for correction, these may be passed to the candidate at the end of the examination. In the case of a (category 1) 'Pass' decision, these notes will likely form the only written guidance supplied to the candidate.



- 6.3 Where the decision of the Examining Board is that the candidate should 'Pass upon completion of corrections and amendments', the candidate will be informed of the required changes when told of the outcome. Any notes of minor corrections prepared by one or both of the Examiners will be given to the candidate at the end of the viva and may be supplemented by additional written guidance agreed by both Examiners: the Chair should provide any supplementary guidance to the candidate within **7 days** of the viva.
- 6.4 If the candidate has not been successful on this occasion, the Chair will outline the key deficiencies of the thesis. If the candidate is permitted to resubmit their thesis for either the intended or a subsidiary award, the Chair will arrange for a written statement explaining the deficiencies and the modifications required, agreed by both Examiners, to be provided to the candidate within **14 days** of the viva.
- 6.5 The Examiners are not permitted at this stage to determine whether a second viva will be required following resubmission of the thesis, regardless of the candidate's performance in the oral examination. The assumption should be that a second viva will take place, until such time that the examiners have assessed the resubmitted thesis and determined whether a further viva is required.
- 6.6 At the conclusion of the viva, the Examiners will complete their Joint Report and Recommendation, which will be countersigned by the Chair. The External Examiner is also asked to complete a report on quality and standards.
- 6.7 The Chair will, in addition, complete a report on the conduct of the examination. It should ideally be completed on the day of the viva but must be provided to the Convenor with all accompanying Examiners' reports no later than **2 working days** after the viva.

## 7. **Failing to Reach an Agreement**

- 7.1 In those rare cases where Examiners are unable to reach an agreement on the outcome, no decision must be recorded, and the candidate should be informed that the examination process has been suspended.
- 7.2 The Chair of the Examining Board will write, via Education Governance (PGR Quality and Operations), to the Chair of ASQC giving a clear account of the Examining Board disagreement. The Examiners' preliminary reports and part-completed Joint Report will accompany this account.
- 7.3 The Chair of ASQC will make such arrangements as are necessary for the disagreement to be resolved.

## 8. **After the Viva**

- 8.1 With the exception of a (category 1) 'Pass' decision, the outcome of the viva will be reported to Education Governance (PGR Quality and Operations) no

later than **2 working days** after the viva so that formal notification can be issued to the candidate.

- 8.2 Where a (category 1) 'Pass' decision is recommended, the candidate is permitted to make minor typographical corrections, which do not need to be checked by an Examiner, within a **maximum period of 1 week**. This outcome should be reported to Education Governance (PGR Quality and Operations) once the candidate has completed those corrections and the thesis has been uploaded to the University's digital repository. Formal notification will then be issued to the candidate.
- 8.3 The candidate should not contact the Examiners directly following the viva. If a candidate wishes to seek clarification on the required modifications, this should be done via the Chair who will contact the Examiners. Any such correspondence should be limited and should not extend beyond the period immediately following receipt of the Examiners' instruction and guidance.
- 8.4 Where the candidate has not been successful on this occasion but is permitted to resubmit their thesis upon payment of a resubmission fee, it is the supervisor's responsibility to advise the candidate through the resubmission period. This role cannot be assumed by an Examiner, since doing so would compromise their impartiality in re-examining the thesis.
- 8.5 Where the Examining Board has recommended that the candidate will be approved for the award upon completion of corrections and amendments, it is typical practice for the supervisor to continue to advise the candidate, post-viva, should they require guidance. This role cannot be assumed by an Examiner.

## 9. **Failure to Complete Corrections and Amendments**

- 9.1 If a candidate completes corrections and amendments which are mostly to the satisfaction of the designated Examiner(s) but with a small number of typographical and/or formatting errors remaining, the Convenor of the Examining Board may permit the candidate to correct those errors within a maximum period of **1 further week** from notification.
- 9.2 If a candidate fails to complete corrections and amendments to the satisfaction of one or both Examiners, and these cannot be addressed in line with 9.1 above, the Convenor of the Examining Board will write to the relevant College Postgraduate Dean, via Education Governance (PGR Quality and Operations).
- 9.3 The Convenor will provide a copy of the Examiners' preliminary and joint reports and a summary of the issue. Where corrections have been completed by the candidate but these are not to the satisfaction of one or both Examiners, the summary will describe the corrections stipulated by the Examiners and outline the deficiencies identified by the Examiner(s) as remaining in the amended thesis.

9.4 The College Postgraduate Dean will take appropriate action to address the matter, which may require consideration and approval from the Chair of ASQC.

## 10. Examination of a Resubmitted Theses

10.1 Both Examiners will assess the resubmitted thesis independently and submit a preliminary report to the Convenor of the Examining Board indicating their views on the resubmission and whether they require a second viva to be held. They will be asked to do this within **6 weeks** of receipt of the thesis. Examiners should not correspond with each other regarding the thesis prior to the submission of their report.

10.2 If both Examiners are satisfied independently that the resubmitted work meets the criteria for the intended award, they may, at their discretion, waive the requirement for a second viva. In such cases, the Convenor will co-ordinate the completion of the Examiners' Formal Recommendation and Joint Report and other examination documentation within **14 days** of receipt of the preliminary reports.

10.3 If no second viva is to be held, it is recommended that a meeting of the Examining Board be held via electronic means to facilitate agreement of any further corrections required and the content of the Joint Report.

10.4 The Convenor will arrange for Education Governance (PGR Quality and Operations) to be informed of the Examiners' recommendation immediately following the decision, and for the candidate to be notified of any further corrections required.

10.5 If both Examiners do not agree that the thesis can be approved for the intended award, a further viva must be arranged.

## 11. Examiners' Reports

11.1 Upon completion of the examination, the Head of Education Governance (or nominee) will consider the Examiners' reports and provide an Institutional Response to the External Examiner. Where any issues have been raised in the reports that relate to supervision or the delivery of the programme, a response will first be sought from the appropriate Head of School (or nominee), who will advise on any action that will be taken.

11.2 A summary of the issues and recurring themes will be reported as part of the University's quality processes.