

## **XV. Doctor of Philosophy Examination Conventions**

### **A. Scope**

1. These Examination Conventions apply to all candidates at Newcastle University who, having met the requirements of the University's *General Regulations* and the *Doctor of Philosophy Degree Progress Regulations*, are eligible to submit for examination for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

These Examination Conventions apply to a submission either by thesis or by published work. Where these examination conventions refer to a thesis, they also apply to a published work submission by staff candidates. The basis for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy to staff candidates shall be the same as the basis for the award of the degree to student candidates.

#### **Notes for Published Work Submissions – for Staff Candidates Only**

(i) *A submission by published work is only available to candidates registered as staff candidates. A member of staff who wishes to be a staff candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy on the basis of the submission of published work must have held an appointment in the University for a continuous period of at least three years at the time of submission and the study and research carried out during the candidate's period of appointment must have formed a significant contribution to the published work.*

(ii) *The published work submitted should overall be seen to be broadly comparable to a PhD thesis in the same discipline, so that it is evidently the result of a sustained level of recent research activity normally in a single field of study to which it makes an original contribution.*

(iii) *The submission shall consist of a collection of published material including papers, chapters, monographs or books. The publication of papers shall normally have taken place in refereed journals, or other journals held in high standing by academics working in the relevant field. Books, monographs, and chapters in books shall normally have been published by established publishing houses or other recognised publishing media. The publications submitted shall normally relate to work undertaken during a minimum period of three years and a maximum period of six years.*

(iv) *Work shall only be regarded as published if at the time of submission copies of the work are generally obtainable through normal sources, such as publishing houses, bookshops and academic libraries. Proofs of papers not yet published but accepted for publication are acceptable. However, reports or other documents prepared for organizations such as private companies, government departments or charities or for internal University purposes are not acceptable unless they have been published widely outside the organization for which they were prepared.*

## B. Appointment of Examiners

2. A candidate's thesis shall be examined by examiners appointed by the dean of postgraduate studies on behalf of Senate. The examination shall consist of a review and assessment of the candidate's thesis (and where appropriate, other artefacts) by the examiners appointed and of an oral examination on the content of the thesis and subjects related thereto. A candidate may also be encouraged to give a presentation of the work embodied in the thesis in the form of a public lecture or seminar.
3. There shall ordinarily be one external examiner and one internal examiner appointed for each candidate. For staff candidates, the examination shall normally be conducted by two external examiners for each candidate although for junior members of staff, at the discretion of the dean of postgraduate studies, one external and one internal may be appointed.
4. All examiners will be nominated by the relevant head of school in consultation with the candidate's academic supervisor. Such nominations shall be submitted on the approved form at the same time as the candidate submits an application for approval of thesis title. This should normally be three months before the thesis is submitted. (*The Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes provides further details in the section, 'Criteria for Appointment of Examiners'.*)
5. Where the University is unable to appoint, or chooses not to appoint, an internal examiner for a student candidate, a second external examiner will be appointed.
6. In all cases where two external examiners are appointed, the dean of postgraduate studies will also appoint an independent member of University staff who will chair the oral examination. The Independent Chair will normally be from outside the candidate's school/institute. The independent chair is not an examiner of the thesis but provides guidance on University regulations and procedures to ensure that the oral examination is conducted in accordance with normal University practice. The Independent Chair is required to be present for the duration of the oral examination. (*The Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes provides further details in the section, 'Criteria for Appointment of Examiners'.*)
7. The supervisory team will provide candidates with the opportunity to comment on the nominated examiners. If the candidate believes that there is a concern about the nominated examiners this should be drawn to the attention of the supervisory team and the head of school in writing, as soon as possible. Examiner appointments will, however, be reviewed only if it is clear that there may be bias or prejudice by an examiner.
8. A former member of staff of the University shall not normally be appointed as an external examiner until at least five years have elapsed since that person left the employment of the University. A retired member of staff of the University shall not normally be appointed as an external examiner. A retired member of staff of another institution may be appointed as an external examiner only if he or she is still active in the field of research and study concerned.

*Note: The University cannot undertake to arrange the examination of a thesis immediately after its submission. Candidates are warned that several weeks may elapse between the submission of a thesis and the completion of the examination, and they should consult their academic supervisor at least three months in advance of submission. The normal period between submission of a thesis and an examination is ten weeks, although circumstances may necessitate a longer time frame. Candidates shall be kept informed of the progress of the examination at monthly intervals by the Graduate School Administrator, should the examination process extend beyond the normal ten week period.*

### **C. Examiners' Preliminary Reports**

9. The examiners should independently write a preliminary report indicating their provisional assessment of the thesis and of the issues to be explored in the oral examination. It is expected that, if the criteria for the award of the degree have clearly been met, the preliminary reports will be very brief (a single paragraph). If, on the other hand, the examiners have serious concerns about whether the criteria have been met, fuller reports will be expected. Each examiner's preliminary report should be sent to the relevant graduate school administrator in advance of the oral examination taking place. Examiners should not consult with each other before both independent reports have been submitted to the graduate school administrator. The reports will be forwarded to the relevant dean of postgraduate studies. They must not be shown to the candidate or the supervisory team in advance of the oral examination. But examiners should be aware that preliminary reports will be made available to candidates after the oral examination if they request them under the provisions of the Data Protection Act.

10. Exceptionally, and two weeks or more in advance of a scheduled viva, if the external examiner upon initial independent review of the thesis is unequivocally of the view that the thesis is not worthy of defence without significant re-work by the candidate, s/he shall contact the graduate school administrator. The dean of postgraduate studies shall then determine whether it is appropriate for extraordinary arrangements to be put in place for the examiners to confer before the scheduled meeting. If approved by the dean, the examiners will be permitted to prepare a joint report. The decision reached under these arrangements shall be limited to Convention 29 (biii) only – i.e. permitting resubmission, and the terms of Convention 34 must apply. An oral examination will be required after resubmission.

### **D. Personal Extenuating Circumstances**

11. Following submission of thesis, if a candidate is aware of any circumstances that may prevent them from attending the oral examination, these should be brought to the attention of their supervisor and the graduate school administrator immediately, to determine if it necessary to delay the oral examination.

12. A candidate should also contact their supervisor and the graduate school administrator if there are personal circumstances they believe could impact on their performance at the oral examination. This information will be provided to the examiners in advance of the oral examination, to determine if any reasonable adjustments are required.

13. Irrespective of personal circumstances, examiners will be expected to assess the candidate against the doctoral assessment criteria.

14. By attending an oral examination, a candidate is declaring that they are fit to attend the examination and, as such, it is unlikely that a candidate would be able to submit a later claim that their performance was affected by personal circumstances.

## **E. Nature of the Examination**

15. The examination shall consist of a review and assessment of the candidate's thesis by the examiners appointed and of an oral examination on the content of the thesis and subjects related thereto, chaired by the external examiner, where an independent chair has not been appointed. The viva shall be conducted in accordance with the guidelines in the University's *Handbook for Examiners of Research Degrees*.

16. The purpose of the oral examination is to enable the examiners to:

- a) establish that the research has been undertaken by the candidate;
- b) test the ability of the candidate to defend his or her thesis;
- c) establish whether the candidate has a satisfactory knowledge of the wider field surrounding the research topic.

17. In exceptional circumstances the dean of postgraduate studies may, subject to the agreement of the examiners, exempt a candidate from the oral examination, subject to alternate arrangements being in place to assess the above aspects.

18. In examining a candidate's thesis, the examiners should take into account the assessment criteria detailed in the 'Criteria for the Doctorate' section of the University Handbook for Examiners of Research Degrees.

19. The results of the research and study must be satisfactorily presented in the thesis which should include matter worthy of publication. The thesis itself need not however be submitted in a form suitable for publication.

20. In the case of any work done jointly, or in wider collaborations, or under direction, it is important that the extent of the candidate's own contribution is made clear both in any introductory element of the thesis and at relevant points within the thesis.

## **F. Public Presentation**

21. In association with the examining process, a candidate may be encouraged to give a presentation of the work embodied in the thesis in the

form of a public lecture or seminar. Such a presentation shall not, however, form part of the formal examination and shall not contribute to the examiners' decision on the candidate's performance.

### **G. Role of the Supervisory Team during the Examination**

22. A member of the supervisory team will not be appointed as an internal examiner.

23. The academic supervisor may, at the request of the candidate, be present at (but will make no contribution to) the oral examination. S/he should in all cases be available to be consulted by the examiners on the occasion of the oral examination. The academic supervisor will have the right to confer with the examiners following the oral examination, and to be given an oral report on its outcome.

24. The academic supervisor will co-ordinate the arrangements for the oral examination and inform the graduate school administrator of the details.

25. Under no circumstances should the arrangements for the oral examination be delegated to the candidate. There should normally be no direct contact between the candidate and the examiners before or after the oral examination.

### **H. Examiners' Final Reports**

26. Having considered all the evidence presented to them, the examiners shall submit a joint report form on the examination. The report shall include a written statement concerning the candidate's performance and the manner in which the work submitted has contributed to the advancement of knowledge and understanding, together with a recommendation as to the outcome of the examination. The report should also address directly any concerns raised in the preliminary reports and make clear the areas required for amendment if they require revisions or resubmission (See Convention 42).

27. The joint report must be sent to the relevant graduate school administrator. The report will be forwarded to the dean of postgraduate studies who shall consider it and decide whether due process has been followed. Exceptionally, the dean of postgraduate studies may require further information from the examiners to justify their decision. After consideration of the report by the dean of postgraduate studies, copies of the joint report will be sent to the candidate and the supervisory team by the relevant graduate school administrator (unless there is disagreement between the examiners, see Conventions – 44-46 below). A copy shall also be sent to the head of school or nominee, unless otherwise directed by the dean of postgraduate studies.

28. Where two external examiners have examined the thesis and it is agreed that revisions are required (in the recommendations 29 a.ii or a.iii or c.ii or c.iii) they should agree between them which examiner shall receive the revised thesis and ensure that the required revisions have been made.

*Note: that preliminary reports and a joint report should be completed for all examinations requiring the input of both examiners. This applies to both first submission and re-submission.*

## **I. Recommendations Open to the Examiners**

29. Following the first submission and examination of a candidate, the examiners may only make the following recommendations:

- a)
  - i. that the candidate be admitted immediately to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy; *or*
  - ii. that the candidate be admitted to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy subject to minor corrections, (e.g. of detail or presentation but not involving changes to the substance of the text/doctoral statement) made to the satisfaction of the internal examiner, within a period of one month of receiving formal notification of the corrections to be made; *or*
  - iii. that the candidate be admitted to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy subject to minor revisions, (e.g. of a more substantial nature than in ii above, but not involving a major revision of the thesis/doctoral statement) being made to the satisfaction of the internal examiner, within a period of up to six months of receiving formal notification of the revisions to be made.
  
- b)
  - i. that the candidate's thesis/submission be deemed to be of a satisfactory standard, but that the candidate be adjudged to have failed to satisfy the examiners in the oral examination and that the candidate therefore be required to submit within six months either for a second oral examination or for a written examination, as the examiners shall determine in their written report; *or*
  - ii. that the candidate be adjudged to have failed to satisfy the examiners in the thesis/submission and the candidate be permitted to revise and re-submit the thesis/submission within twelve months for re-examination by both examiners, without a further oral examination; *or*
  - iii. that the candidate be adjudged to have failed to satisfy the examiners and the candidate be permitted to revise and re-submit the thesis/submission within twelve months for re-examination by both examiners and be examined orally; *or*
  
- c)
  - i. that the candidate has reached the standard required for the appropriate Masters Degree and should immediately be awarded that degree instead; *or*

- ii. that the candidate has reached the standard required for the appropriate Masters Degree and should be awarded that degree instead subject to minor corrections of the text/doctoral statement made *to the satisfaction of the internal examiner*, within a period of one month of receiving formal notification of the corrections to be made; *or*
- iii. that the candidate has reached the standard required for the appropriate Masters Degree and should be awarded that degree instead subject to minor revisions being made *to the satisfaction of the internal examiner*, within a period of up to six months of receiving formal notification of the revisions to be made.
- d) that the candidate be permitted to revise and re-submit the thesis/submission for the appropriate Masters Degree within twelve months for re-examination by both examiners and be re-examined orally if the examiners so require by indication in their written report.
- e) that no degree be awarded and that the candidate be adjudged to have failed.

#### **Minor Revisions or Corrections**

30. Recommendations 29 (a) or (c) may be made subject to a requirement that the candidate correct minor textual errors or make minor revisions to the thesis before the deposit of a copy of the thesis in the University Library in accordance with the *Rules for the Submission of Work for Higher Degrees*.

31. Where minor textual corrections are required, candidates will be advised by the relevant graduate school administrator that the corrections must be made within one month of receiving formal notification of the corrections. It shall be the responsibility of the internal examiner to certify that the necessary corrections have been made before a pass list can be issued.

32. Where minor revisions to the thesis are required, the candidate shall normally be required to make the revisions within six months of receiving formal notification of the revisions to be made.

33. It shall be the expectation that the thesis will not require referral back to the external examiner and that the candidate will not be expected to undergo a further oral examination. However, if the internal examiner feels that any recommendation other than recommendations 29 (a)(i), (a)(ii), (c)(i) or (c)(ii) is appropriate following reconsideration of the thesis after the minor revisions have been made, the thesis shall also be referred to the external examiner.

#### **Resubmission for Re-examination by Internal and External Examiners**

34. In the case of a candidate subject to recommendations 29 (b) or (d) above, the revisions expected of the candidate shall be more substantial than in the case of a recommendation 29 (a) or (c). However, these recommendations shall be made only where the examiners are of the view that the thesis is basically acceptable for the degree concerned and/or that it is reasonable to expect the candidate to be able to attempt to revise and

resubmit the thesis successfully in the normal time available and without conducting significant further basic research.

35. At resubmission, candidates must provide a commentary indicating the changes they have made to the thesis in response to the requirements of the examiners.

36. If the extraordinary arrangements under Convention 10 have been applied, the examiners will be required to conduct an oral examination upon resubmission.

37. In exceptional cases, an extension of time for making the corrections may be granted by the appropriate dean of postgraduate studies, subject to the candidate justifying such an extension, supported by the academic supervisor.

### **Recommendations after Resubmission for Re-examination by Internal and External Examiners**

38. Where the candidate's oral performance on the first occasion of examination was satisfactory and the examiners are agreed, after considering the resubmitted thesis, that a further oral examination is not required, they may submit their recommendations without re-examining the candidate orally.

39. Examiners may, on consideration of the revised thesis, require a further oral examination, even if this had not originally been required as part of resubmission.

40. Where a candidate has been permitted to revise and resubmit a thesis in accordance with Conventions 29 (b) or (d), the only options open to the examiners when re-examining the thesis shall be one of the following, as appropriate;

a)

- i. that the candidate be admitted immediately to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy; *or*
- ii. that the candidate be admitted to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy subject to minor corrections, (e.g. of detail or presentation but not involving changes to the substance of the text/doctoral statement) made to the satisfaction of the internal examiner, normally within a period of one month of receiving formal notification of the corrections to be made;
- iii. that the candidate be admitted to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy subject to minor revisions, (e.g. of a more substantial nature than in ii above, but not involving a major revision of the thesis/doctoral statement) being made to the satisfaction of the internal examiner, within a period of up to six months of receiving formal notification of the revisions to be made.

*or*

b)



- i. that the candidate has reached the standard required for the appropriate Masters Degree and should immediately be awarded that degree instead; *or*
- ii. that the candidate has reached the standard required for the appropriate Masters Degree and should be awarded that degree instead subject to minor corrections of the text/doctoral statement made *to the satisfaction of the internal examiner*, normally within a period of one month of receiving formal notification of the corrections to be made; *or*
- c) that no degree be awarded and that the candidate be adjudged to have failed.

*Note: Following the resubmission outcome and submission of the revised thesis, no further revisions to the thesis other than minor textual corrections made to the satisfaction of the internal examiner, normally within a period of one month after receiving formal notification may be recommended.*

#### **Recommendations Following a Further Oral or Written Examination**

41. In the case of a candidate subject to recommendation 29 b(i) and (d) above, the only options open to the examiners when re-examining the thesis shall be one of the following, as appropriate;

- a)
  - i. that the candidate be admitted immediately to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy; *or*
  - ii. that the candidate be admitted to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy subject to minor corrections, (e.g. of detail or presentation but not involving changes to the substance of the text/doctoral statement) made to the satisfaction of the internal examiner, normally within a period of one month of receiving formal notification of the corrections to be made;
  - iii. that the candidate be admitted to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy subject to minor revisions, (e.g. of a more substantial nature than in ii above, but not involving a major revision of the thesis/doctoral statement) being made to the satisfaction of the internal examiner, within a period of up to six months of receiving formal notification of the revisions to be made.

*or*
- b)
  - i. that the candidate has reached the standard required for the appropriate Masters Degree and should immediately be awarded that degree instead; *or*
  - ii. that the candidate has reached the standard required for the appropriate Masters Degree and should be awarded that degree instead subject to minor corrections of the text made *to the satisfaction of the internal examiner*, normally within a period of one

month of receiving formal notification of the corrections to be made;  
or

- c) that no degree be awarded and that the candidate be adjudged to have failed.

*Note: Following the resubmission outcome and submission of the revised thesis, no further revisions to the thesis other than minor textual corrections made to the satisfaction of the internal examiner, normally within a period of one month after receiving formal notification may be recommended.*

### **Provision to the Candidate of Information about Corrections/Revisions Required or Resubmission**

42. In all cases where a candidate is required to make corrections/revisions to a thesis or to resubmit a thesis, it shall be the responsibility of the examiners to provide full details of the corrections, revisions or additional publishable material (for published work submission) required of the thesis, but not extending to proof-reading or editing of the thesis. The examiners should provide a detailed written statement of the nature of the changes they wish to see made to the thesis, along with their completed joint report form. These should be sent to the relevant graduate school administrator who shall formally forward these documents on to the candidate and the supervisory team. When forwarding the final report to the candidate, the graduate school administrator will make it clear to the candidate that resubmission in itself will not guarantee the award of a qualification.

### **K. Communication of the Result to the Candidate**

43. The dean of postgraduate studies acts as the Chair of the Board of Examiners and any recommendations are considered by the dean who will then confirm or otherwise the recommendations of the examiners, following receipt of examiner reports by the graduate school administrator. The results of the examination or re-examination shall be communicated formally to the candidate by the relevant graduate school administrator, once they have been considered by the dean of postgraduate studies. Neither an examiner nor any other person is empowered to communicate the result formally to a candidate before the official notification of the result to the candidate by a graduate school administrator on behalf of the Academic Registrar. In any case where an examiner chooses to give the candidate an informal indication as to the recommendation that will be put forward, the examiner concerned must stress that the recommendation is subject to ratification and that only the graduate school administrator (on behalf of the Academic Registrar) is empowered to issue official results.

### **L. Disagreement between the Examiners**

44. If there is a disagreement between the examiners or doubt about their intentions, they shall be consulted with a view to resolving the matter. Where there is irreconcilable disagreement between the examiners an additional external examiner shall be appointed.

45. The additional external examiner shall be asked to read the candidate's thesis and to conduct an oral examination. The additional examiner shall be told that the previous examiners had failed to reach agreement but will not have sight of their reports. On the occasion of the second oral examination the supervisory team (and where appropriate the internal examiner) shall be available to be consulted by the additional external examiner. The dean of postgraduate studies shall appoint a member of University staff as an independent observer, who will report on the conduct of the viva. The academic supervisor shall co-ordinate the arrangements for the oral examination. After the conclusion of the oral examination, the additional examiner shall make a recommendation which shall be final. He/she shall submit a final report which will, subject to the approval of the relevant dean of postgraduate studies, be forwarded to the candidate and the supervisory team in the normal way. In the event that changes to the thesis are required it will be the additional external examiner who shall examine the thesis.

46. Where a disagreement between examiners is identified at the examination of a resubmission, the additional external examiner shall be asked to read the candidate's thesis and to consider the work submitted against the examiners joint report from the first submission. If an oral examination is required for the resubmission the dean of postgraduate studies shall appoint a member of University staff as an independent observer, who will report on the conduct of the viva. After the conclusion of the oral examination, the additional examiner shall make a recommendation which shall be final. He/she shall submit a final report which will, subject to the approval of the relevant dean of postgraduate studies, be forwarded to the candidate and the supervisory team in the normal way. In the event that minor textual corrections are required, they will need to be made to the satisfaction of the additional external examiner.

47. A candidate who is subject to the procedure set out in Conventions 44 to 46 shall be informed that the examiners originally appointed have disagreed and that an additional examiner will be appointed. The candidate shall not be informed as to the nature of the disagreement between the original examiners and shall not be given a copy of their reports. If, however, the candidate subsequently appeals against the final decision in respect of the award of the degree, the report of the original examiners will form part of the formal record of appeal. The candidate shall be informed that a second oral examination will be required. After the second oral examination, and once a final decision as to the award of the degree has been made in accordance with Conventions 29, 38 and 41, the final report of the additional examiner shall be made available to the candidate and the supervisory team.

### **M. Provision for an Oral Examination to be Conducted Outside the University**

48. It is expected that all oral examinations will take place within the University unless specifically requested otherwise and that all expected attendees are present at the University. With the approval of the dean of postgraduate studies, the oral examination for a candidate may be held

elsewhere than at Newcastle. Both examiners should be present at any oral examination and only in very exceptional circumstances may the dean of postgraduate studies permit other arrangements to be made. (Further guidance is available in the University Handbook for Examiners of Research Degrees.) A member of the supervisory team is not normally expected to be present unless at the specific request of the candidate to attend the venue for an examination held outside Newcastle, but is expected to be available to be contacted by the examiners if required, for example by telephone. In all cases written consent for the examination to be conducted outside the university must be obtained from the candidate.

## **N. Posthumous Awards**

49. A posthumous degree can be awarded where a deceased candidate's body of work is sufficient to meet the criteria for the award. To initiate a request for a posthumous award, the academic supervisor should provide a statement to the relevant dean of postgraduate studies outlining why the deceased candidate should be considered for the posthumous degree. Requests should be endorsed by the head of school (or nominee) in which the candidate was registered and should normally have the support of the student's family. (The Policy on Posthumous Awards for Postgraduate Research Students provides additional detail <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/students/progress/assets/documents/PolicyonPosthumousDegreesforPostgraduateResearchStudentsAugust2015Final.pdf> )