Graduate Board
Examinations Group

External Examiner Briefings

This document is designed to guide you when providing a briefing to an external examiner who will be undertaking their first UK PGR examination. It is not intended as a prescriptive list but suggests areas and topics which might be covered. This is intended to familiarise the Examiner with the requirements of the UK system and the expectations of Leeds and should be a dialogue with the opportunity for questions. It must be provided by a senior, experienced internal examiner who is independent of the candidature and the examination. A face to face meeting before the viva the preferred format (although phone is acceptable where this is not practicable).

Programme structure

- External Examiner is key feature of UK quality assurance processes.
- Learning Outcomes for each programme: http://www.leeds.ac.uk/rsa/graduate_board/pos.html
- Examiners are asked to bear in mind that a PhD\(^1\) thesis represents research that may reasonably be expected of a capable and diligent student within the standard period of study.
- Doctorate\(^1\) award at Leeds: examiners must identify and report on evidence of originality, independent critical ability and matter suitable for publication (peer-reviewed publishable quality in the discipline).

Before the viva

- Complete a separate, independent preliminary report after evaluating the candidate’s thesis. Do not make a recommendation at this stage. Reports exchanged before viva to help plan format & questions

The viva

- Purpose of the viva: to ensure that the work reaches the University standards for the degree; that the work has been written and is understood by the candidate and to place the research in the context of the wider field.

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\(^1\) A different emphasis will be needed where the thesis is practice-led research, professional doctorate or a Masters by Research/MPhil submission and also if part-time/split-site student
- **Closed viva**: only the candidate, the examiners (and the supervisor if agreed) in attendance.
- Both the internal and external examiners take an equal and active role in the viva.
- Examiners **must not reveal a recommendation to the candidate in advance of the viva**.
- Examiners must reach a joint recommendation after the viva about whether the award of the degree can be recommended, based on their assessment of the written thesis combined with the candidate’s performance in the viva.
- Stated criteria for award of the degree: e.g. doctorate degree - evidence of originality, independent critical ability and matter suitable for publication (peer-reviewed quality in the discipline).⁴¹
- Viva is an opportunity to raise questions in areas where examiners are not satisfied with the thesis and encourage the candidate to provide convincing evidence that the criteria for award can be met.

**After the viva**

- The candidate must be advised of the examiners’ recommendation within 24 hours.
- A joint examiners’ report is required following the viva which must indicate the examiners’ recommendation and how the candidate has met (or not) the criteria for the award of the degree. This must provide specific examples from the thesis and viva.
- Possible recommendations examiners can make (including corrections, referral & MPhil award on PhD). If referral: specific notes for guidance must be prepared. These will be sent to the candidate.

**Useful links:**

- **QAA: Doctoral Degree Characteristics** sets out the generic characteristics of a UK doctoral degree and includes comparisons with Europe and elsewhere: [http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Doctoral_characteristics.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Doctoral_characteristics.aspx)
- University of Leeds **Instructions to Examiners** cover the responsibilities and duties of Examiners prior to, during and following the viva plus guidance on completing requisite forms: [http://www.leeds.ac.uk/rsa/thesissubmissionandexamination/staff/instructions.html](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/rsa/thesissubmissionandexamination/staff/instructions.html)
- University of Leeds Examiners’ **Preliminary Report Form** Templates: [http://www.leeds.ac.uk/rsa/thesissubmissionandexamination/staff/preliminary.html](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/rsa/thesissubmissionandexamination/staff/preliminary.html)
- University of Leeds Examiners’ **Joint Report Form** Templates: [http://www.leeds.ac.uk/rsa/thesissubmissionandexamination/staff/report_forms/report_form.html](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/rsa/thesissubmissionandexamination/staff/report_forms/report_form.html)

Approved by the Examinations Group
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