

**UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN**  
**Trinity College Dublin**

## **Guidelines for Examiners of Candidates for the Ph.D.**

An external examiner and an internal examiner (two external examiners in the case of candidates who are members of staff of the University) are nominated to the Dean of Graduate Studies by the School's Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) in consultation with the Supervisor. Each examiner must independently submit a signed report and completed decision form to the Dean of Graduate Studies after the viva voce examination. Examiners' names are formally presented to the University Council in consolidated form once a year.

### **1. Expected Standards of the Thesis Submitted for Examination**

In judging the merit of a thesis submitted in candidature for the degree of Ph.D., the examiners should expect the standard and scope of work that a capable and diligent student should present after a period of three to four years of full-time study or its part-time equivalent.

In making their recommendations, examiners should note the **standard criteria** for a doctoral thesis in this University: it must show evidence of rigour and discrimination, appreciation of the relationship of the subject to a wider field of knowledge/scholarship, and make an appreciable, original contribution to knowledge; it should show originality in the methods used and/or conclusions drawn, and must be clear, concise, well written and orderly and must be a candidate's own work.

The submission of a thesis is at the discretion of the candidate. A candidate is advised, but not required, to seek the agreement of his/her supervisor prior to submission. Postgraduate students whose thesis is under examination are considered as registered students of the university for the duration of the examination.

### **2. Viva Voce Examination**

A viva voce examination is a normal requirement in the examination of a Ph.D. thesis. The internal examiner will make arrangements in conjunction with the School admin staff for date and time for the *viva voce*. The external examiner should contact the internal examiner directly, not the Graduate Studies Office, concerning these arrangements.

The conduct of the examination is the responsibility of the examiners, in consultation with the Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate). The Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) or nominee may chair the viva voce. **The role of the chair is to clarify College regulations, where appropriate, and to ensure that the viva voce is conducted in a courteous and professional manner. The chair must intervene if the examiners do not adhere to these regulations. While there is no specified length for a viva voce examination, when the examination exceeds 2.5 hours the chair should offer the student and examiners a comfort break of 10 minutes**

Application must be made to the Dean of Graduate Studies in advance of the viva voce if it is proposed to run the viva voce on any other basis than that of a live face-to-face examination with all participants in the same venue: such applications will only be favourably considered in the most exceptional circumstances. The supervisor, or under exceptional circumstances and with the prior agreement of the Dean of Graduate Studies, other cognate person, may attend the viva voce examination with the agreement of the examiners. If the supervisor attends the viva voce it is as an observer only; the supervisor may not partake in the examination, though the examiners may invite the supervisor's contribution on points of clarification.

Normally, the viva voce examination is held in Dublin, with the travel and accommodation expenses of the external examiner covered by College (economy class air fare for overseas travel). Exceptionally, the Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate), in consultation with examiners and the candidate, and with the prior approval of the Dean of Graduate Studies, may arrange for the examination to be held outside Dublin, in which case the internal examiner's travel expenses (but not the candidate's expenses) will be covered by College.

When there is disagreement between examiners as to whether a thesis should be passed as it stands or passed with minor corrections, the Dean of Graduate Studies will adjudicate. Where there is disagreement between examiners as to whether a thesis should be referred for major revision, awarded a lower degree or failed, the Dean of Graduate Studies attempts to get agreement between examiners on the course to be adopted. If agreement is not achieved, the Dean of Graduate Studies may adjudicate or propose that new examiners be appointed. This change of examination arrangements must be duly notified to and approved by the University Council. If new examiners are appointed, all reports are sent to the Dean of Graduate Studies.

The candidate must complete the corrections required by examiners and submit two hardbound copies in the final corrected form to the Graduate Studies Office before the candidate's name is submitted to the University Council. A memorandum is required from the internal examiner certifying that corrections have been carried out satisfactorily. Minor corrections should be completed within two months of the candidate receiving an official results letter from the Graduate Studies Office informing them that corrections are required. If the examiners refer the thesis for major revision, this means that re-examination is required (though a second viva voce is not permitted) and the candidate must pay a revision fee (see the University Calendar, Part 2, Section 8). Under exceptional circumstances, and with the prior permission of the Dean of Graduate Studies, revised theses' may be submitted up to an absolute maximum of two years after the original date of submission. Such late submissions will be subject to a further revision fee. A thesis can only be referred for such major revision once – and a thesis can therefore only be examined twice in total before a final decision on it is reached.

### 3. Examiner's Formal report to University Council

Examiners are asked to complete the examination process, including viva voce, **within two months** of receiving the thesis or as soon as practically possible thereafter. Internal and external examiners must report separately. Each must return their copy of the decision form (enclosed) appropriately completed and signed, along with their independent, signed, report directly to the Dean of Graduate Studies for submission to the University Council. The decision forms and typescript reports must be independent to allow for examiners to take different positions if they wish. This does not preclude discussion between examiners whose names will be made known to each other in their respective letters of appointment.

There is no set format for an examiner's report. However, it should confine itself to justification for the decision reached, reported in the context of the *standard criteria* on the previous page. An external examiner's report on an examination for a doctoral thesis should not normally exceed three pages.

The typescript report must contain a clear recommendation in the phraseology below, as to whether:

- 1) the degree should be awarded for the thesis as it stands
- 2) the degree should be awarded, subject to minor corrections being made to the thesis

Candidates are allowed two months from the time of notification from the Graduate Studies Office to complete the corrections. The typescript report must make clear to the candidate the corrections which their thesis requires. This might be accomplished in the form of an annotated copy of the thesis, or a list of corrections or both. The internal examiner must confirm to the Dean of Graduate Studies that the required corrections have been carried out satisfactorily.

- 3) the thesis should be referred back for revision

The candidate is required to re-register and pay a revision fee and to submit the revised thesis for re-examination by both examiners **within six months**. The typescript report must make clear to the candidate the areas in which their thesis is deficient and the corrections which are required. In part, this might be accomplished in the form of an annotated copy of the thesis, or a list of corrections or both. However, an additional, extensive critique of the deficiencies of the thesis is also required. The Calendar provides that revised theses may be submitted up to an absolute maximum of two years from the original date of submission in exceptional circumstances and with the prior permission of the Dean of Graduate Studies. No

viva voce examination will be held during re-examination of the thesis. This option (3) is not available if the thesis has already been referred back for revision.

- 4) a lower degree (M.Sc., M.Litt.) should be awarded

A lower degree should be awarded if necessary following minor corrections to the thesis. The typescript report must make clear to the candidate the areas in which their thesis is deficient and why these deficiencies are not addressable by revision or re-submission.

- 5) the thesis should be failed (*i.e.* rejected)

The typescript report must make clear to the candidate the areas in which their thesis is deficient and why, in the examiner's view, the thesis is irredeemably flawed.

#### **4. Freedom of Information Acts**

The texts of the external and internal examiners' reports are initially available only to the Dean of Graduate Studies, the University Council, the Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) and the Supervisor. However, candidates are entitled to see the reports relating to their examination on written request. Such requests should be addressed to the Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) who would bring their request to the Dean of Graduate Studies.

Under the terms of the Irish Freedom of Information Acts 1997 and 2003, the University of Dublin, Trinity College, in common with other Irish universities, is a prescribed 'public body' subject to the Acts. These FOI Acts provide a right of access to records held by public bodies. External examiners should note that anything written or recorded in any form by them in the course of and for the purposes of the performance of their functions as an external examiner may be the subject of a request under the Freedom of Information Acts. The right of access includes the right to one's own personal records, and the examination records of students come under the definition of a student's personal records. These records would include examiners' reports and any examination scripts and assessments that have been marked (and annotated) by the examiners. In general, the College must give a copy of these records to the student concerned if he or she makes a request for them under the Freedom of Information Acts. Additionally, students have the right to be given, on request, a written statement of the reasons for a decision of the College that affected them as individuals. Such decisions would include examination/assessment issues.

Further information regarding the Acts and their application to Trinity College is available at <http://www.tcd.ie/foi/>



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