

This document has been produced by the Doctoral College to provide guidance to examiners of doctoral and research degree programmes. It aims to clarify the examination process, ensure consistency in practice, and assist examiners to determine appropriate outcomes. Examiners will make their recommendations to the Board of Studies (Doctoral) which holds responsibility for deciding to make an award on behalf of the University. Examiners are asked to read this document **before** completing their preliminary reports.

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Advice for examiners on the assessment of doctoral work produced during the COVID-19 pandemic

Additional note for examiners of doctoral and research degrees: This document aims to clarify the extent and nature of scope for consideration, and flexibility that may be exercised, by examiners when examining work affected by the pandemic's disruptions and raises points to consider when prescribing revisions or corrections that may require the candidate to undertake additional data collection or travel.

The University's Regulations state that a Doctoral Degree can be awarded to a candidate who has: (i) presented a thesis on the candidate's advanced study and research which satisfies the Board of Examiners as: (a) making an original and significant contribution to knowledge; (b) giving evidence of originality of mind and critical judgement in a particular subject; (c) containing material worthy of peer-reviewed publication; (d) being satisfactory in its literary and/or technical presentation and structure with a full bibliography and references; (e) demonstrating an understanding of the context of the research: this must include, as appropriate for the subject of the thesis, the scientific, engineering, professional, commercial and social contexts; and (ii) passed a viva voce examination conducted by the examiners on the broader aspects of the field of research in addition to the subject of the thesis.

The University recognises that the pandemic has had a profound effect on many doctoral research projects through its impact on, for example, the availability of laboratory and other research facilities, fieldwork, and access to human subjects. In line with UKRI advice issued in April 2020, the University advised its doctoral students to revise their research projects to reduce the impact of the pandemic's disruption as far as possible.

Examiners should be aware that the direction of some research projects carried out during the pandemic, and the content and scope of the resulting theses, may have been dramatically affected, such that the final body of work is very different to what had been planned before the onset of the pandemic. As a consequence, some flexibility can be applied by examiners when assessing the submitted work in terms of the scale of the data collection, the methods used or the logical progression of the work. Examiners may consider that rescoping projects, adopting alternative research questions and alternative methodologies demonstrates the resilience, resourcefulness, and creative problem-solving skills of these researchers.

Examiners are also requested to consider the practicalities of carrying out further data collection when setting corrections or revisions, as students may still be limited in their ability to access research facilities or resources or in their ability to travel.

Pandemic disruptions will have had a different impact on each doctoral student and each research project. Whilst the work presented for examination should stand on its own merits, examiners are advised to invite the students at the start of viva voce examinations to comment on how the pandemic may have caused them to adapt or modify their original research plans. However, the candidate's personal circumstances should not be taken into account during the assessment of the work presented for examination, as there are other mechanisms to mitigate for these.

The University has sought to provide mitigation to its doctoral students for some of the disruption they have experienced. This has included extensions to funding and to students' registration periods, increased leniency in approval of suspensions, mechanisms for recovering time lost to COVID-19, and access to an enhanced hardship fund. In addition, the University has offered greater flexibility in transferring to writing up status whilst campus facilities were unavailable and support in terms of more regular contact with supervisors, with increased backup from student services and welfare support services.

While examiners are asked to take into account possible effects of disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the University of Bath's expected academic standards for successful doctoral research remain unchanged with no diminution in the academic rigour and level of attainment required to fulfil stated Regulations for award of doctoral and research degrees.

Accessing the thesis or portfolio document submitted for examination

Most doctoral programmes are assessed via a thesis submission, the exception being the professional doctorate programmes of DClinPsy, EngD and EdD which instead require (or allow) a portfolio of work to be presented for examination. Throughout this document the term 'thesis' is used to represent both submission types.

Theses and accompanying forms are routinely provided in electronic format only. The link to securely access the files will be sent to the examiners by the Doctoral College. Examiners should not examine a copy of the work sent to them directly from the candidate (or their supervisor). If an examiner requires a printed copy of the thesis to work with, please inform the Doctoral College and arrangements will be made to provide a paper copy.

Confidentiality

Examiners should treat the work submitted for examination as confidential both during and after the assessment process. Occasionally a candidate's work may be subject to a particular restriction as a condition of funding, and where such a restriction is in place, examiners will receive a non-disclosure agreement to sign, before the thesis can be shared with them. Where specific arrangements for the examination need to be made in response to needs identified by the candidate, or in a Disability Action Plan, these should also be treated as confidential.

Authorship and Originality

The preliminary pages of the thesis shall indicate where any part of the thesis has been produced by the candidate jointly with others and confirm that a substantial part is the original work of the candidate. In an alternative format thesis, each publication should also be preceded with a declaration of authorship to assist in determining the aspects of the published work that are attributed to the candidate. The preliminary pages of the thesis will also include a declaration identifying whether any material that has already been submitted for another degree has been included, and the extent of that material, and the degree obtained.

We also ask examiners to be mindful of the student's usage of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools. The University of Bath's current position is that we do not ban or discourage doctoral students in using such tools; however, have reinforced support and training for academic integrity so that any use of AI tools is effective, ethical, and transparent. Given the University has not sanctioned the usage of any online AI detector tools, we ask examiners to use their professional judgement and expertise regarding the usage of an AI tool in doctoral submissions, noting that students should acknowledge it as a source when they are directly quoting from AI tools (see guidance on Generative AI and Referencing <https://teachinghub.bath.ac.uk/guide/genai-and-referencing/>) and also acknowledge upfront in their statement of originality if they are using it to generate content or ideas, or assist them more generally in developing their work (see Point 7 on Academic Integrity Statement <https://www.bath.ac.uk/corporate-information/academic-integrity-statement/>).

Verbal questioning during the viva voce examination is used to establish that the candidate is the author of the work presented for examination and can demonstrate appropriate understanding of the broader aspects of the field of research and the context of its main findings or argument. Therefore, in relation to the above position and guidance on AI tool usage at the University of Bath, examiners may wish to further explore the originality of the student's work via verbal questioning around processes followed in the examination itself.

Assessment criteria

A doctoral thesis submitted for examination should satisfy the Board of Examiners as:

- (a) making an original and significant contribution to knowledge
- (b) giving evidence of originality of mind and critical judgement in a particular subject
- (c) containing material worthy of peer-reviewed publication
- (d) being satisfactory in its literary and/or technical presentation and structure with a full bibliography and references
- (e) demonstrating an understanding of the context of the research: this must include, as appropriate for the subject of the thesis, the scientific, engineering, professional, commercial, and social contexts.

And the candidate must pass a viva voce examination conducted by the examiners on the broader aspects of the field of research in addition to the subject of the thesis.

The Degree of Master of Philosophy may be awarded to candidates who present a thesis that satisfies the examiners as meeting criterion (b) above; and, if the Board of Examiners so require, also by passing a viva voce examination.

Examination timeline

- An examination should normally take place within 3 months of the submission date. The internal examiner will make arrangements for the examination.
- Once the thesis has been released to them, examiners will normally have 4-6 weeks to read and prepare for the examination. During this period a preliminary report on the work must be returned to the Doctoral College.
- The candidate must be given at least 7 days advance notice of the date of their viva voce examination.
- The examiners will communicate their recommended outcome to the candidate on the day of the examination.
- The jointly written examiners' report, which explains how the recommended outcome was reached and details any corrections or revisions that are required, should be returned to the Doctoral College as soon as possible and always within 2 weeks of the exam date.
- When a corrected thesis has been submitted to the Moodle portal the internal examiner will check the corrections on behalf of the Board of Examiners and should report on their findings within 30 days.
- When a revised thesis has been submitted to the Moodle portal all examiners are required to examine the revised work, again having 4-6 weeks to read the revised submission and prepare for the re-examination. During this period a preliminary report on the revised thesis must be returned to the Doctoral College.

Candidates will be made aware of the time needed for examiners to carry out their role, and examiners should contact the Doctoral College if they are the recipient of undue pressure from candidates or supervisors to examine the submitted work to a shorter deadline.

The role of the External Examiner:

- Examine the candidate's suitability for the award of the higher degree in question
- Enable the University to ensure that its degrees are comparable in standard with those awarded by other universities in the United Kingdom in similar subjects
- Verify that the standards expected of successful candidates are appropriate for the level of the award
- Monitor and report on the proceedings of the Board of Examiners and in particular on whether these ensure that candidates are treated fairly and consistently

The External Examiner is expected to:

- Complete a preliminary report on the work presented for examination and return it a week before the viva voce examination date
- Attend the viva voce examination and work with the internal examiner to decide an outcome
- Contribute to the examiners' jointly written report and the list of corrections/revisions (if needed)
- Examine a revised thesis at a later date (if needed)
- Provide feedback on the examination process

The role of the Internal Examiner:

- Examine the candidate's suitability for the award of the higher degree in question
- Ensure that the examination is conducted in accordance with the University's Regulations and Quality Assurance procedures
- Verify that the standards expected of successful candidates are appropriate for the level of the award

The Internal Examiner is expected to:

- Check the thesis for plagiarism, before clearing it for distribution outside of the University
- Organise the viva voce examination: Liaise with the external examiner, candidate, independent Chairperson, and supervisors to arrange a suitable date for the examination. Please also inform the appropriate Doctoral Programmes Administrator of the date
- Make appropriate arrangements for the viva voce examination, considering any specific requirements identified by the candidate and supplied by the supervisor (e.g. in a Disability Action Plan). The examination may take place in person (on campus) or remotely online via video calling. A video viva may involve all parties connecting remotely, or could be a hybrid meeting where two or more participants meet in person (on campus,) and additional parties join remotely
- Complete a preliminary report on the work presented for examination and return it to the Doctoral College

a week before the viva voce examination date

- Make appropriate arrangements for a pre-viva meeting between the examiners to discuss the preliminary reports and agree a line of questioning to use in the examination (please note that supervisors should not attend the pre-viva meeting, but will make themselves available on the day to consult with the examiners before the examination, if requested)
- Chair the examination, unless an independent Chairperson has been appointed
- Ensure that the recommended outcome is clearly indicated on the examiners' report form, and is supported by the jointly written statement, which also addresses any that comments raised in the preliminary reports
- Where necessary, co-ordinate with the external examiner to produce a corrections/ revisions list, and ensure that any annotated versions of the e-thesis are returned to the candidate
- Return the completed examiners' forms to the Doctoral College as soon as possible and within 2 weeks of the examination date
- Where a candidate is recommended to pass with corrections, the internal examiner will be responsible for checking that the corrections are satisfactory
- Examine a revised thesis at a later date (if needed)

The Preliminary Reports

The preliminary report form will be emailed to each examiner. The reports should be completed independently and returned to the Doctoral College at least one week prior to the examination date. Once all preliminary reports have been returned, the Doctoral College will facilitate the exchange of the reports between examiners. The preliminary reports record each examiner's independent viewpoint on the work presented for examination therefore examiners should avoid entering into any discussions about the work presented for examination until the reports have been returned. The preliminary reports will establish points for discussion with fellow examiners and inform the line of questioning to be used in the viva voce examination.

Examiners may wish to have a copy of their preliminary report accessible on the day of the exam to refer to, as preliminary comments should be addressed in the jointly written report when explaining how the recommended outcome was reached.

Preliminary reports will not be released to the candidate unless formally requested under the terms of the Data Protection Act, or as part of the Academic Appeals and Complaints processes.

Chairing the examination

On the day of the examination the Chair will introduce all persons present, ensuring that they understand the procedures which are to be followed. The Chair should seek to ensure that the candidate has the opportunity, and sufficient time, to respond to all the questions posed, and will be ready to intervene during the examination if there is a danger of misunderstanding, unfairness, bias or unprofessional behaviour.

The Chair will be informed of any reasonable adjustments that may be pertinent to the arrangement or conduct of the viva voce prior to the exam date, and will ensure that any formally recorded needs or requirements set out by the candidate before the exam are met (this may mean acting as timekeeper and facilitating regular breaks, or breaking down long or complex questions to ensure the candidate understands what is being asked of them).

At the end of the examination the Chair will ask the candidate whether they have anything more they would like to add or ask, before inviting them to leave the room to allow the examiners to deliberate.

Independent Chairperson

The role of Chair will ordinarily fall to the internal examiner, being familiar with the University of Bath's examination procedures and protocols. However, on some occasions an Independent Chairperson may be appointed to attend the examination and take on this role. The independent Chair is not expected to be a subject specialist, to have read the thesis submitted for examination, nor to be involved in the examiners' deliberations - other than to provide advice about the correct procedures to follow. Their role is to assist in ensuring that the examination is fair and conducted in accordance with the University's Regulations.

An independent Chairperson is expected to:

- Assume responsibility for managing or Chairing the viva voce examination from the internal examiner (duties listed above)
- Undertake responsibility for the administrative duties of the internal examiner in cases where no internal examiner can be appointed, and two externals are appointed instead

To help fulfil their role, the independent Chairperson may wish to read the preliminary reports and attend the pre-viva meeting between the examiners.

The viva voce examination

The viva voce examination serves to establish that the candidate is the author of the work presented for examination and can demonstrate appropriate understanding of the broader aspects of the field of research and the context of its main findings or argument. A viva voce is mandatory once a doctoral thesis has been submitted to be examined; there is no option to unofficially return the thesis to the candidate for any sort of amendment until the viva voce has been completed. The assessment criteria state that the candidate must both present a satisfactory thesis *and* pass the viva voce examination in order to be awarded a doctorate (Note: MPhil candidates do not have to undergo a viva voce unless the examiners request that one is held).

Conducting a viva voce examination

- The viva voce examination should be held in a suitable room without interruptions from others
- Each examiner should contribute
- There may be intense questioning, but it should be non-aggressive
- Examiners should address the candidate courteously, and they should be treated fairly and appropriately
- Examiners should not refer to the background or personal characteristics of the candidate (in particular to aspects related to age, disability, sex, race, religious belief and sexual orientation)
- There are no rules governing how long the viva voce should take, and short breaks are permitted if necessary/requested
- The examiners will inform the candidate verbally of their recommended outcome at the end of the examination. A member of the supervisory team should be in attendance at the time the candidate is informed of the examiners' recommended outcome
- The examiners will record their recommendation in the jointly written examiners' report which ideally will be completed before the external examiner leaves the examination

Conducting a viva voce exam by video link or video conferencing

Viva voce examinations may take place remotely and online. The procedure for organising a video viva is described in QA7 Appendix 3 <https://www.bath.ac.uk/publications/qa7-research-degrees/attachments/qa7-appendix-3-principles-and-procedure-for-conducting-viva-voce-examinations-for-doctoral-students-remotely-and-online.pdf> This includes detailed advice on what needs to happen before the examination, on the day itself, and in the event of a technical failure.

Video viva additional considerations

The internal examiner should refer to QA7 Appendix 3 which sets out the policy on remote viva voce examinations. Before making the arrangements for the video viva the Internal Examiner must obtain (and retain) email confirmation from all participants that they agree to the video viva format and are able to take part in the examination under those conditions.

A video viva may not be quite the exam experience that the candidate was expecting to have, which may add to their nerves. Test calls can reduce anxiety before the examination. Candidates may request for reasonable adjustments to be made to the video viva setup just as they would if the exam were taking place face-to-face. Certain parameters can be adjusted if the conditions specified in QA7 Appendix 3 are met. For example, all participants must remain visible throughout the examination and the video viva itself cannot be recorded, but auto subtitles may be used to visualise what is being said, or the chat function could be used to discretely ask for additional breaks. Supervisors of candidates who have a Disability Action Plan that requires specific adjustments to the exam setup are responsible for contacting the internal examiner to alert them of this.

Once the video viva arrangements are completed, the internal examiner must inform the lead supervisor of the

examination date and time so they can join the video call when the candidate is informed of the outcome. At the conclusion of a video viva examination, all participants are asked to confirm that holding the examination by video conference has had no substantive bearing on the examination process. Examiners should specifically comment on the conduct of the viva voce examination and refer to the use of video conferencing in their jointly written examiners' report.

Supervisor attendance at the viva voce examination

In common with practice in the UK, the viva voce is a closed examination and does not take place in the presence of friends or colleagues. Supervisors do not routinely attend the viva voce examination; however, candidates may request that the Doctoral College arranges for a member of their supervisory team to attend the viva voce if they feel that it would be reassuring for them. In such cases the Doctoral College will inform the examiners prior to the viva voce examination about who will be present. A member of the supervisory team who has been permitted to attend a viva voce examination must not take any part in the viva voce examination.

Possible outcomes of the viva voce examination (NEWLY UPDATED FOR AY2024/25)

The potential outcomes following the examination of a doctoral or research degree submission are as follows:

- a) **Pass**
- b) **Pass with minor corrections (3 months)**
- c) **Pass with major corrections (6 months)**
- d) **Fail viva but pass thesis element** (possibly with minor or major corrections), and require repeat of the viva voce for overall pass
- e) **Fail with permission to resubmit thesis** (within 12 months). A second viva voce may be held at the discretion of the Board of Examiners.
- f) **Fail, but recommendation to award Master of Philosophy (MPhil) with minor or major corrections***
- g) **Fail**

*Not all doctoral programmes permit the award of a level 7 research degree (MPhil) if the standard for a doctorate has not been met.

The outcomes available in each specific examination will be listed on the examiner report forms provided to examiners by the Doctoral College. Please do not edit or amend the outcomes shown on these forms.

The potential outcomes may be further characterised as:

Pass: All criteria satisfactorily covered. The examiners' report must be comprehensive and support the recommended outcome, stating how each of the assessment criteria were addressed in the work.

Pass with Corrections: The examiners' report must also provide the candidate with details of any corrections that they are required to do, the list should constitute an amount of work that is appropriate for the category (and may be completed within the time allowed). The examiners' report should also specify whether the candidate should provide a summary sheet listing each of the corrections they have made – as this can be helpful when examining the corrections. Only one examiner (usually the internal) is required to examine the corrected thesis.

Fail viva but pass written element: If the candidate was unable to discuss the work satisfactorily, a second viva voce may be needed. Examiner availability will dictate the timeline until the next viva voce. Failure to satisfy the examiners at the second viva voce shall constitute failure of the submission. The thesis may be passed subject to corrections.

Fail with permission to resubmit: Where the submission has not met the criteria, the candidate may be permitted a reasonable timeframe to submit a revised thesis and present for examination for a second time. Candidates may be required to undergo a second viva voce to discuss the revised submission. All members of the Board of Examiners are required to examine a revised thesis submission, this second examination cannot be done by the internal alone. Candidates are not normally permitted more than 12 months to revise their work. An alternative outcome may be more appropriate if the revisions are so extensive that completion within the normal 12-month timeframe would not be feasible.

Some programmes allow examiners to offer a rapid exit route to candidates who they feel have produced a

substandard doctoral thesis, but which nevertheless does reach the standards required for the award of a Master of Philosophy degree. The offer of an MPhil exit award can be made subject to the successful completion of minor corrections (12 weeks). The candidate is entitled to reject this offer and may prefer instead to persist in working towards a revised doctoral thesis submission in twelve months' time.

Fail, but recommend award of the degree of Master of Philosophy: Where the work presented does not have the potential, even after revision, to reach the required standard for a doctorate; examiners may recommend the award of an MPhil if the work satisfies them as 'giving evidence of originality of mind and critical judgement in a particular subject'. The recommendation may be made subject to corrections.

Fail: Where no doctoral or research degree can be awarded because the standard of the work is unsatisfactory, examiners may recommend a fail outcome, without opportunity for any correction or revision work. Noting that some doctoral programmes include a taught phase and may grant exit awards at the postgraduate diploma or certificate level in recognition of the CATs/ Credits accrued by the candidate by completion of taught units. These awards will be considered by the specific *Programme* Board of Examiners at a later date.

Informing the candidate of the outcome

At the end of the examination the candidate should be informed verbally of the examiners' recommended outcome. It should be made clear to the candidate that the recommendation has no authoritative significance until it has been confirmed by the Board of Studies (Doctoral). Where corrections or revisions have been stipulated, the internal examiner is responsible for providing details of the required work to the candidate as soon as possible (and within two weeks of the examination date).

If the candidate requires clarification about the corrections or revisions after the examination date, they should consult in the first instance with their supervisory team. Examiners should not be asked to provide feedback on draft corrections/ revisions prior to formal submission of the corrected or revised thesis.

Completing the examiners' report

The examiners' recommended outcome should be indicated by ticking the appropriate numbered box on the examiners' report form. The examiners recommended outcome must be supported by their jointly written report which should summarise the examiners deliberations, highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis and its defence, and revisit the issues highlighted in the preliminary reports. The report should also provide detailed feedback to the candidate about any corrections or revisions that are required.

Where corrections are indicated as annotations in the examiner's copy of the thesis, this can be provided to the candidate at the conclusion of the exam, but please record in the examiners' report that this has been done (and if possible, include a summary of those corrections).

Immediately after the conclusion of the exam, the examiners' report should be completed, signed by all, and directly returned to the Doctoral College. If the examiners are unable to write a full report or provide a full corrections/revision list at the conclusion of the examination, these details may be forwarded to the Doctoral College (for appending to the report) within two weeks of the examination date. In such cases examiners are asked to specifically indicate when further details are to follow.

Board of Studies review of the examiners' recommendation

The recommended outcome, supported by the examiners' jointly written report, along with each of the preliminary reports will then be reviewed by the Board of Studies (Doctoral). Taken together, these documents must enable the Board of Studies (Doctoral) to determine whether the candidate has satisfied the University's criteria for the award of a research degree as set out in Regulation 16, and that the quantity of any corrections or revisions work specified by the examiners is appropriate to that outcome and may reasonably be expected to be completed within the permitted timeframe. Once approved the Board of Studies (Doctoral) will formally confirm the examination outcome to the candidate. The Board will also set the deadline date for submission of the corrected or revised thesis.

Possible outcomes when examining a corrected thesis, a revised thesis, or a 2nd viva voce exam

When examining a corrected thesis, a revised thesis or a second viva voce examination the examiners will indicate whether the award criteria have now been addressed satisfactorily, and consequently whether an award can now be

made. The examiners' updated recommendation will then be considered by the Board of Studies (Doctoral).

A corrected thesis may be considered either satisfactory or not. If the examiner is not satisfied with the corrections, they may ask the candidate to undertake further work to bring the thesis up to the required standard. This may require an extension to the usual time limit for corrections (up to four weeks). If, following such an extension, the corrections made are still not to the examiners' satisfaction, the examiner will inform the Board of Studies of the candidate's failure to reach the required standard.

A second viva voce may be considered either satisfactory or not. If the candidate has not demonstrated an understanding of the context of the research, including as appropriate for the subject of the thesis, the scientific, engineering, professional, commercial and social contexts then a third viva voce attempt cannot be permitted, and the examiners will inform the Board of Studies of the candidate's failure to reach the required standard.

A revised thesis submission may be considered a:

- a) **Pass**
- b) **Pass with minor corrections (3 months)**
- c) **Fail, but recommendation to award Master of Philosophy (MPhil) with minor corrections***
- d) **Fail**

*Not all doctoral programmes permit the award of a level 7 research degree (MPhil) if the standard for a doctorate has not been met.

Pass: All criteria are now satisfactorily met, and the examiners list of revisions identified in the first examination have been adequately addressed. The examiners' report must be comprehensive and support the new outcome, stating how each of the assessment criteria were addressed in the revised work.

Pass with further minor corrections: The examiners' report must also provide the candidate with details of any further minor corrections. The list should constitute an amount of work that is appropriate for the category (and may be completed within the time allowed). If the corrections will take longer, please consider whether the recommendation is appropriate.

Fail, but recommend award of the degree of Master of Philosophy: Where the revised work presented does not reach the required standard for a doctorate; examiners may recommend the award of an MPhil if the work satisfies them as 'giving evidence of originality of mind and critical judgement in a particular subject'. The recommendation may be made subject to minor corrections at this point.

Fail: Where no doctoral or research degree can be awarded because the standard of the revised work remains unsatisfactory, examiners may recommend a fail outcome. Noting that some doctoral programmes include a taught phase and may grant exit awards at the postgraduate diploma or certificate level in recognition of the CATs/ Credits accrued by the candidate by completion of taught units. These awards will be considered by the specific Programme Board of Examiners at a later date.

What to do when...

Examiners cannot reach an agreement

If the Board of Examiners cannot agree on a recommended outcome, they should submit separate reports. The disagreement will then be reported to the Board of Studies (Doctoral), who may recommend that another Board of Examiners be appointed, without prejudice to the candidate.

The candidate indicates they may need more time to complete the corrections/revisions

It is important that candidates meet the deadline for submission of a corrected or revised thesis. In exceptional circumstances a candidate may request an extension to their deadline. Examiners should direct candidates to contact their programme administrator about requesting permission for such an extension from the Board of Studies (Doctoral). Examiners should not propose different timescales to those listed on the forms provided.

Examining a doctoral thesis submitted in the 'alternative format'

It is acknowledged that publishing journal articles is increasingly important for doctoral students, particularly for career development. Since 2016 the University of Bath has allowed candidates to submit a doctoral thesis written in an alternative format, which incorporates academic papers as a substitute for a chapter or part of a chapter. The aim being to preserve the fundamentals of the doctorate being a coherent supervised training in research, whilst making its outputs closer to postdoctoral career expectations, i.e. publication in peer review journals.

Papers may be published, accepted, submitted, or drafted up for future submission, in reputable refereed journals. If more than one academic paper is included, they must be closely related in terms of subject matter and each must form part of the cohesive research narrative of the thesis. Commentary text before and after each academic paper will fully contextualise and integrate the paper into the thesis, in effect forming a thesis chapter. As each academic paper will have self-contained components (introduction, methodologies) that may overlap with other sections of the thesis, there may be some duplication of material in these sections.

Co-authored papers may be included in the alternative format thesis. Candidates can be examined on any co-authored material they have included in their thesis. Regulations require that 'the thesis shall indicate, where it, or any part of it such as a published paper, has been produced by a candidate jointly with others, that a substantial part is the original work of the candidate'. Therefore, a statement of authorship form, describing the candidate's contribution (in terms of the formulation of ideas, design of the methodology, experimental work, and presentation of the data in journal format), must preface each co-authored paper.

Wherever possible, examiners will be notified before the examination that the thesis they will be examining has been submitted in the alternative format. Although this format may not be familiar, there are formal guidelines for candidates who wish to present their work in this manner to ensure parity between a thesis that is written in the traditional monograph format and one that incorporates one, or more, academic papers. A thesis written in the alternative format must still meet the same award criteria that are applied to a traditional monograph thesis.

Examiners are entitled to specify corrections to any part of the thesis presented for examination, including parts submitted for publication, or already published. Under these circumstances, the necessary corrections will be incorporated into the commentary text associated with that paper. Candidates are instructed not to amend or alter the text of published articles that have been replicated in the thesis. Each paper included in the thesis text must be clearly identified and accompanied with a citation to the original publication. If the examiners require extensive revisions that cannot be addressed by minor correction to the commentary text, then the candidate should be instructed to rewrite that chapter in the traditional format (which would require a suitable timeframe for completion).

Examining a Professional Doctorate thesis

The maximum word count for a Professional Doctorate thesis is substantially less than for a PhD in the same subject. In order to reach the research phase of the programme, the professional doctorate student will have completed a taught phase, which includes substantial D level course work assignments. Therefore, the professional doctorate programme structure allocates fewer CATS/ credits for completion of the research phase than are allocated for the PhD programme. Despite this, the professional doctorate thesis must still meet the same assessment criteria that are applied to all Bath doctorates.

The work presented in a professional doctorate thesis may lead directly to professional, organisational, or policy-related change, and students are encouraged to choose a research question that relates to their professional interests or experience. The assessment criterion 'making an original and significant contribution to knowledge' may apply equally to the field of professional practice, as to contributions to a specified academic field.

Conducting an examination that doesn't include a viva voce step

There are two occasions when the Board of Examiners may decide that no viva voce is necessary, and that the examination can take place purely via a dialog between the two examiners

- a) A revised thesis submission where the viva voce in the first examination attempt was satisfactory, and
- b) An MPhil thesis submission.

In such cases the examination protocol is as follows:

- The candidate submits the thesis to Moodle, and the internal examiner conducts the plagiarism check.
- The Doctoral College sends both examiners a link to securely access the thesis and the exam paperwork
- The internal examiner contacts the other participants (External Examiner, Independent Chair) to agree a date to convene and discuss the work presented for examination.
- The internal examiner informs the candidate and their supervisor of the examination date.
- The examiners complete and return their preliminary reports at least 7 days before the agreed exam date.
- The examination takes place – the work is discussed, and a recommend outcome is recorded in the examiners' jointly written report.
- The examiners communicate their recommended outcome to the candidate on the day of the examination and provides them with the details of any corrections or revisions that are required.
- The examiners' jointly written report is considered by the Board of Studies (Doctoral).
- The Doctoral College formally confirms the outcome of the examination, and the timeline for the completion of any corrections, to the candidate.

Examining an MPhil thesis submission

When a candidate has submitted a thesis to be examined for the award of MPhil, the Board of Examiners have discretion to determine whether a viva voce examination is necessary to aid them in reaching an award decision. The need for a viva voce should be indicated on the preliminary report forms, which must be returned to the Doctoral College at least 7 days prior to the agreed examination date. The exam process should then follow the appropriate examination stages outlined above (either for a viva voce, or an examination that doesn't include a viva voce). To award an MPhil, the examiners must be satisfied that the thesis evidences both originality of mind, and critical judgement in a particular subject.

The process of examining an MPhil thesis in partnership with an external examiner substantially differs from that followed in the formative examination of a PhD confirmation report after the first 12 months of study. The conduct of this summative examination, to determine the award of a degree, must follow the formal University of Bath examination protocols.

Examining a revised thesis

Where a candidate is permitted to present a revised thesis for re-examination, this is treated as the second (and final) examination attempt. Therefore, a new set of preliminary reports will be used to gather each examiner's independent views on the work now presented for examination. These should be returned to the Doctoral College before the examiners discuss the work together. If the examiners believe that a second viva voce is needed, this should be recorded in the preliminary report.

Once the revised thesis has been examined, the Board of Examiners' recommended outcome should be indicated in the Examiners' Report. A revised thesis may pass subject to minor corrections – however a further round of thesis revisions and a third examination attempt are not permitted.

The examiners' recommended outcome must be supported by a jointly written report which should:

- summarise their deliberations
- highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the revised thesis
- where a second viva voce has been held – the candidate's performance in the examination
- revisit the issues highlighted in the preliminary reports

- confirm whether the revisions specified at the first examination have been carried out satisfactorily
- clearly state whether the revised thesis now meets the assessment criteria for the award

The report should be returned to the Doctoral College as soon as possible after the examination has been completed.

Plagiarism is detected in the thesis during the examination process

A similarity report will be generated for every thesis submission and checked for plagiarism by the internal examiner. The University takes academic malpractice very seriously and if there is a suspected assessment offence the examination will be delayed until an investigation has been carried out.

It may be anticipated that a thesis written in the alternative format will return a high similarity score – as it will replicate text published elsewhere. Additionally, the prior submission of draft chapters during the year 1 Confirmation examination may also lead to high similarity scores in some parts of the final thesis text. Internal examiners are asked to use their academic judgement on what is acceptable, and should be aware of the procedures for dealing with suspected plagiarism (and other assessment offences), which are set out in the procedure for inquiring into allegations of misconduct in research and scholarship https://www.bath.ac.uk/publications/allegations-of-misconduct-in-research/attachments/PROCEDURE_FOR_INQUIRING_INTO_ALLEGATIONS_OF_MISCONDUCT_IN_RESEARCH_AND_SCHOLARSHIP.pdf and the quality assurance code of practice statement QA53 (Examination & Assessment Offences) <http://www.bath.ac.uk/quality/documents/QA53.pdf>

There is an unexpected interruption to the examination

The Chair should take the lead in instigating appropriate action. Where it is not possible for the viva voce to continue, the examiners should determine whether sufficient discussion has taken place for a final recommendation to be made or whether a new date needs to be arranged to continue the examination.

Notes for external examiners

Feedback on the examination process

External examiners are invited to provide feedback on the examination process. Your comments will be shared with the relevant Director of Studies, and Faculty/School Doctoral Studies Committee and will be used for annual monitoring and review purposes with the aim of enhancing the examination process at the University.

Examiner Fee and Expenses

You can claim your examiner fee and request funds to cover travel and subsistence expenses incurred in the execution of your role by using the form available here: <https://www.bath.ac.uk/publications/postgraduate-examiner-fees-and-expenses-claim-form/> Email your form to the Doctoral College and it will be processed upon receipt of the examiners' report.

Regulations and Quality Assurance requirements

The policy on assessment and award for all doctoral and research degree programmes is set out in *Regulation 16* <https://www.bath.ac.uk/publications/regulations-for-students-2024-25/>. This includes details of the potential examination outcomes and exit awards, and the doctoral award criteria, while any programme-specific assessment regulations are detailed as additional provisions.

When assessing criterion (d): 'being satisfactory in its literary and/or technical presentation and structure with a full bibliography and references', examiners may wish to refer to the specific guidance provided to candidates on how to construct their doctoral thesis submission which is located in: *QA7 Appendix 6: Specifications for Higher Degree Theses and Portfolios* <https://www.bath.ac.uk/publications/qa7-research-degrees/>

The procedure for organising a video viva is described in *QA7 Appendix 3 Principles and procedure for conducting Viva Voce examinations for doctoral students remotely and online* <https://www.bath.ac.uk/publications/qa7-research-degrees/>

Updated Aug2024 DC.