



Guidelines for PhD Examiners

These Guidelines should be read in conjunction with Academic Council Regulation 4.

1. The Board of examiners for a PhD normally comprises (a) an external examiner appointed by the NUI on the recommendation of the College and the Academic Council, and (b) two internal examiners appointed by the Academic Council on the recommendation of the College; the nominating Professor and/or the supervisor may act as internal examiners. Where the candidate is a member of staff of any of the NUI universities or recognised Colleges, the Board consists of two external and one internal examiner.
2. The Head of School should, at the appropriate time, i.e. at least three months before the candidate's thesis is submitted, initiate the procedures for appointing the board of examiners by securing agreement from suitable persons to act as internal and external examiners and nominating them to the College. The College will send the names of recommended examiners to the Academic Council, and the Registrar will forward Academic Council nominations of external examiners for approval by the NUI. This procedure should be followed even where the subject extern is the nominated external examiner for a PhD candidate.
3. A copy of the PhD thesis will be sent to each examiner by the Examinations Office (candidates are permitted to submit the thesis in soft binding for examination purposes). The time required for examination of the thesis, including the *viva voce* examination, should not normally exceed two months. Where circumstances arise which might substantially delay the examining process, the examiner concerned should inform the Head of School and/or Assessment.
4. When reading the thesis, examiners should give particular attention to the following points:
 - o The originality of the work described and the theories developed in the thesis;
 - o The candidate's familiarity with the published work of other authors in related areas;
 - o The candidate's ability to summarise the work of other authors and to synthesise a theoretical framework within which to position the work described in the thesis;
 - o The candidate's prose style should be appropriate to the discipline, but clear, simple, unambiguous writing, which is syntactically and grammatically correct, is required of all candidates;
 - o The methodology adopted by the candidate to address the research topic - Is it accurately and comprehensively described? Is it appropriate to the topic? Is the candidate aware of alternative methodologies which might

- o have been employed?
 - o Is the candidate sensitive to any inherent weaknesses in the methodology? Where a novel method has been developed, has it been tested and calibrated appropriately?
 - o Experimental Design (where appropriate)
 - o Presentation of the results of the research. Are the results presented in a clear, accessible way? Are tables, figures or plates, where included, adequately annotated and correctly referenced in the text?
 - o Interpretation of Results: are the candidate's conclusions reasonable on the basis of the evidence presented? Has the significance of the results been fully appreciated by the candidate? Has the correct statistical analysis been employed (where appropriate) and justifiable conclusions arrived at? Have theories formulated on the basis of the results taken into account relevant findings published by other authors? Has the candidate identified any weaknesses or lacunae in the evidence adduced?
 - o The bibliography - is it comprehensive and up-to-date? Are references to the published literature annotated accurately and consistently in a recognised citation style?
 - o Presentation of the thesis - is it free of typographical and other errors?
5. It is the policy of the university that every PhD candidate should be examined orally by the board of examiners. The objectives of the *viva voce* examination are to provide an opportunity for the examiners to clarify any issues of fact which may have arisen in examining the thesis, to test the candidate's knowledge of the thesis topic and related areas of research and, as far as possible, to establish the originality of the candidate's work and ideas. The *viva* also provides an opportunity for the candidate to elaborate on aspects of the research which may not have been included in the thesis and to defend the arguments presented and the ideas developed in the thesis.
 6. The Head of School will make the arrangements for the *viva voce* examination, or will ask one of the internal examiners to do so. *Viva voce* examinations should normally be held on campus; in exceptional circumstances the examination may be held elsewhere, provided the candidate agrees to the arrangement. Expenses incurred by the external examiner in travelling to Dublin for the *viva* will be reimbursed by the NUI.
 7. Care should be taken in choosing the location for the *viva* to ensure that the examination can be conducted in a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere without risk of interruptions or extraneous noise. Examiners and the candidate should be reminded to switch off phones before the commencement of the examination.
 8. The external examiner plays a key role in the *viva* and should lead the discussion with the candidate and explore the strengths and weaknesses of the research work and the thesis. The external examiner should also test the candidate's knowledge of the field and familiarity with recent publications in the area. The internal examiners, particularly where the supervisor is also an examiner, should play a largely silent role, unless invited by the external examiner to contribute to the discussion of the work.
 9. The report of the examiners may recommend:
 - o Award PhD - no corrections to the thesis required
 - o Award PhD - subject to minor corrections
 - o Revise thesis and submit for re-examination

- That the PhD not be awarded

10. Where all examiners are of like mind, a single, joint report signed by all examiners should be submitted to the Examinations Officer. Where the opinions of the examiners differ, separate reports may be submitted. The Director of Assessment will bring the reports to the attention of the Academic Council Standing Committee on Examinations and the procedures set out in paragraphs 5.10 - 5.14 of Academic Council Regulation 4 will be followed. Where there is a conflict of opinion between the external and internal examiners, the Academic Council may recommend that the NUI should seek the views of a second external examiner.
11. The examiners' report should be submitted in the appropriate format and will normally be about 500 words in length. The report should be signed by all the examiners.
12. In writing their report, the examiners should bear in mind that the report will be considered by the Academic Council Standing Committee on Examinations and that not all of its members will be expert in the subject matter of the thesis. The report should include a brief description, in lay terms, of the work presented in the thesis and an outline of its principal conclusions. The report should include a brief assessment of the candidate's knowledge and comprehension of the background to the research topic and the work of other authors in related fields. The examiners should comment broadly on the strengths and weaknesses of the research and of the theoretical framework developed by the candidate in the thesis and at the *viva voce* examination. The quality of the presentation of the thesis should be mentioned.
13. It is important that there should be consistency between the opinions expressed in the report and the examiners' recommendation in relation to the award of the degree. For example, if several negative comments are included in a report which recommends the award of the degree, the examiners should take care to indicate the strengths of the work which outweigh its weaknesses and which persuaded them to recommend that the degree be awarded.
14. Where minor corrections to the thesis are required by the examiners, a list of these may be attached to the report together with the name of one of the internal examiners who will be responsible for ensuring that the corrections have been made. Alternatively, the list of corrections required may be given directly to the internal examiner responsible for approving the corrected thesis for submission. Hard-bound copies of the thesis, incorporating any corrections required by the examiners (together with a letter to this effect from the responsible examiner), must be submitted to Assessment before the Academic Council Standing Committee on Examinations will consider the award of the degree.
15. Where the examiners recommend that the thesis be revised and re-examined, the reasons for this recommendation should be outlined in the report. Where possible, the examiners should advise the candidate on areas of weakness which should be addressed in a resubmitted thesis and on errors and/or omissions in the presentation of the work which should be made good in a revised thesis. The examiners may also wish to convey to the candidate through one of the internal examiners, a more detailed prescription for improvement of the thesis. Where the award of the degree is not recommended, the reasons for this recommendation should be detailed in the report and a report which is longer than usual may be necessary. Examiners should be aware that the candidate may appeal the outcome of the examination to the Examination Appeals Committee. In this event,

the Director of Assessment will make the examiners' report available to the committee and to the candidate. For this reason, the decision of the examiners should be justified by reference to the weaknesses in the candidate's work and knowledge apparent in the thesis and as revealed at the *viva* examination.

16. Under the Freedom of Information Act 1997, all candidates are entitled to request a copy of the examiners' report. It is therefore now the policy of the university to disclose the report to the candidate if requested.