

## GOOD PRACTICE FRAMEWORK FOR HRD STUDENTS AND SUPERVISORS

### Examination Report Process and Guidance

#### Doctoral Examination Report Process

Examiners' reports are integral to the examination process. Indeed, the reports will raise issues that are likely to be the subject of the oral examination, and so are strictly confidential until all three reports have been submitted. As soon as all three are submitted they are distributed to all examiners.

The GRS then releases these reports to the candidate and supervisors 10 working days prior to the oral exam (but will allow up to 5 working days if the reports are delayed in being submitted). If the delay is such that the GRS is unable to supply these at 5 working days, the examination will be rescheduled.

It is important to note that the reports are only meant to guide the candidate. Candidates should view the oral examination as an opportunity to defend their entire body of work, and not just focus on the points raised in the examiners' written reports. Consistent with the spirit of a 'defence' of the thesis, examiners are expected to address the entire body of the thesis and may ask questions and address points not raised in the written reports.

#### Guidance for Supervisors

- Meet with the candidate prior to the examination to discuss the reports and to provide guidance on preparation for the oral (the 10-minute introductory presentation, as well as discussion points to anticipate). It may be helpful to meet and discuss the reports as a supervisory team (at least with those attending the oral examination).
- Remind the candidate of the role of examiners as individuals assessing the written work and as a panel that comes together to make a decision based on the written work and oral examination, informing them of the [examination process](#) and [outcomes](#).
- Remind the candidate that the written report is just one part of the examination process: the oral is also an important part and one cannot be considered in isolation from the other.
- Reassure the candidate by reminding them of the purpose of the examination (to demonstrate their unique contribution to research in their field, and their capabilities as a researcher). Remind them of their abilities and skills as a researcher, and the contribution their research makes to the field. You might make use of the tips for students, outlined below.
- Facilitate a practice oral examination, if it would be helpful for your candidate to present their research to other researchers and answer questions from an audience.
- Examination can be a challenging, stressful experience. If a candidate is distressed to the point that there is cause for concern regarding his or her mental health and wellbeing, please refer the student to the University's [counselling services](#). There is also an [information page](#) for staff which may be helpful in identifying if a student is at risk. If you have any concerns about a student, please also notify the Graduate Research School.

## Guidance for Convenors

- Read the examiners' reports, as part of your preparation for meeting with the candidate and facilitating the oral examination.
- After candidates have received reports, arrange a meeting with them to discuss the oral examination process. Preferably, this will be face to face, but it may need to be over the phone or internet.
- Refer any academic questions a candidate may have back to their supervisors. Remember, your role is to facilitate the examination process, not to give academic advice about the candidate's research. You may give advice on the presentation (e.g., timing, framework), how to answer questions, what to bring to the exam, how to prepare, what process the examination is likely to take etc.
- Often examiners include their questions and criticisms in the report, and you might want to remind candidates that the oral exam can take a different approach when the panel comes together. Rebutting each question or criticism might not prove necessary or helpful. Rather, candidates should re-familiarise themselves with their thesis, focusing on the 'big picture' of significance of their work.
- The final advice for supervisors regarding the challenges of examination is very relevant to convenors, too. Please ensure that any concerns you might have about a candidate's mental health and wellbeing are addressed and shared appropriately.

## Guidance for Candidates

- Discuss examiners' comments with your supervisor.
- Practice your presentation and prepare yourself for questions that might arise.
- Make only minor grammatical, typographical or bibliographical changes to your thesis prior to the oral examination; wait until after the examination to make any more substantial emendations that might be agreed by your examiners.
- Keep in mind, you are the expert on your work and you should convey that expertise in the oral exam. Be prepared to talk about your work with confidence; balanced with legitimate research humility.
- Remember, examiners are fallible humans, just like the rest of us. Sometimes their written reports focus on the shortcomings of the thesis; this does not automatically mean that the oral exam will be challenging in ways that disadvantage candidates.
- Prepare for the oral exam by re-familiarising yourself with the minutiae of your thesis (as some months will have elapsed since submission). Check for recent papers that may have appeared in that time; and then focus on presenting the 'big picture' of the significance of your work at the outset of the oral exam.
- A careful summary of why your thesis tackled the problem it did, and what we now know that we did not before, and why those findings matter, sets the tone for the whole oral exam.
- The examiners' written reports will indicate the areas of your work that have caused them concern; but they may not mention everything that bothers them, nor (conversely) will they necessarily comment on the exciting and novel parts of your work. So please: do not let their reports derail your own preparation. It would be very unhelpful to prepare by trying to rebut each of their written criticisms. The written comments often bear little resemblance to the direction of an oral exam. If there are fair criticisms, you may want to acknowledge that during the oral. If there are unfair or simply wrong criticisms, wait to see if they raise those in the oral; and then you can stand your ground and patiently explain what has been misunderstood.



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