

Internal and External Examiners and Chairs – Roles and Responsibilities

Prof Mick Fuller

UKCGE Workshop , University of Reading, Jan 2010

Stages in Examination

- Nomination of Examiners (**Supervisory Team**)
- Approval and Appointment of Examiners (**Grad. Committee**)
- Submission of the thesis (**Student**)
- Assessment of the thesis – (pre-viva Report) (**Examiners**)
- (Observation of Exhibition – Arts/Practice) (**Examiners**)
- Viva voce (**Examiners and Student**)
- Decision (**Examiners**)
- Revise thesis - corrections or resubmission (**Student + Supervisors**)
- Verification of corrections (**Examiner(s)**)
- Completion – final hard-bound corrected thesis submission (**Student**)
- Graduation (**Grad School or Registry**)
- Graduation Ceremony



Recognising the roles: Examination and Exam Board

- Examination
 - Working towards the decision of the outcome
- Exam Board
 - Recording the outcome and verifying the decision
 - The exam board decision is provisional, the degree is not awarded until the corrections have been done and the bound thesis handed-in



Institutions need to train their Internals & Chairs and inform their Externals of their procedures

Fair play & Standards

- The student deserves:
 - A competent examining team who know where the threshold for pass is
 - An examining team that is fair, knows the field of study and challenges appropriately
- The Institution expects:
 - An examining team which upholds the standards of the degree equal to other institutions
 - An examining team that knows and follows the regulations



Examining roles

- Ensuring there is a balanced team of examiners (previous examining experience)
- Internal and external examiners
 - Equal weight?
 - Internal defers to External?
 - Inexperience defers to Experience?
 - Consensus decision
- Academic judgement – threshold judgement not a Nobel prize
 - (but should we have Pass, Pass+, Pass++???)
- Criteria based decision – QAA criteria



QAA FHEQ (2009) Doctoral Descriptors

Doctoral degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- the creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication
- a systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice
- the general ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems
- a detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry.



Internals vs Externals

Both

- read the thesis, prepare questions and ask questions in the viva, make a decision

Internal

- completes the paperwork, may not always be “spot-on” the subject checks the corrections, doesn’t get paid

External

- Expected to be more “spot-on” the subject, assures cross-comparability across institutions, gets an honorarium



Academic needs

- Read the thesis and prepare questions
 - Major points for discussion
 - Challenge errors and misconceptions
- Make an academic judgement
 - Pass
 - Pass with minor corrections (define minor)
 - Resubmission after rewrite
 - Fail at PhD but Pass at MPhil (with minor corrections)
 - Fail outright
- Deliver feedback
- Approve the corrections or re-examine the resubmitted thesis



Admin needs

- Chairing the examination
- Complete the examination form and get the signatures of the examining team
- Get the list of corrections needed
- Get the examination form to the relevant admin dept (Grad School/Registry)



The Independent Chair

3 institutional scenarios

- Always used
- Never used
- Sometimes used – special circumstances to ensure procedures are followed and that the student is given a fair viva

If there is no Chair present then who chairs the viva??



University of Plymouth Regs.

A chair of an MPhil/PhD viva voce examination is an exceptional circumstance and has been approved either by Graduate Committee or the Head of the Graduate School. The reasons for appointing a Chair can be various and include:

- Videoconfered viva
- Equality issues (eg Disability, Gender)
- Issue(s) raised by either the internal or external examiner in the pre-viva report
- Examination team has only recently met the minimum requirements of examining experience
- External examiner is an experienced researcher from industry but with little or no examining experience.
- The Chair will be provided with copies of the pre-viva reports of the examiners and a copy of the thesis but is not an examiner. It is recommended that the Chair reads the Abstract and scans the thesis for any gross irregularities.



Litigation

- Complaints and Appeals
 - if a student fails to get the award
- Appeals are not allowed against academic judgement – (but ensure examiners document why they failed the candidate against the FHEQ criteria)
- If Procedures are not followed then the examination decision may be null and void – an over-riding reasons to have a Chair or experienced Internal Examiner



General proportions of Outcomes

- Pass – no corrections 0.1%
- Pass – with corrections 85-90%
- Defer - Resubmission 10-13%
 - then pass 9-12%
 - then fail and get MPhil 1%
- Fail but get awarded MPhil 1-2%
- Fail outright 0.001%



