

POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH HANDBOOK

Chapter 12 - Handbook for Examination of Postgraduate Research programmes

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1. Introduction

- 1.1** The Handbook for Examination of Postgraduate Research Programmes aligns with the QAA guidance on assessment as laid out in ['UK Quality Code, Advice and Guidance: Research Degrees'](#).
- 1.2** The handbook provides staff and students with the University's requirements related to the assessment of Postgraduate Research degrees. It **should** be consulted in conjunction with other relevant documentation, including:
- a. [TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 11: Statement of Procedures: Presentation of theses/dissertations for degrees in the Faculty of Postgraduate Research.](#)
 - b. [The Credit and Qualifications Framework.](#)
 - c. [Academic Regulations and Ordinances within the University Calendar.](#)

1.3 There are some generic principles that underpin the requirements specified in this Handbook. These are:

- a. The equitable treatment of students.
- b. Transparency.
- c. Consistency.
- d. Maintenance of the academic standards and integrity of University of Exeter awards.

1.4 References to 'thesis' throughout this handbook refers to requirements for both dissertations and theses submitted as part of a postgraduate research programme.

2. Award Specific Information

2.1 The following information is specific to the award in question and is contained in the Regulations for that award:

- a. Requirements pertaining to length of thesis.
- b. Award assessment criteria.
- c. Recommendations of the Board of Examiners.

Regulation No.	Programme Name
2.1	<u>Regulations Governing the Degree of Master of Philosophy</u>
2.2	<u>Regulations Governing the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy</u>
2.3	<u>Regulations Governing Professional Doctorate Degrees</u>
2.5	<u>Regulations Governing the Degrees of Master of Arts by Research and Master of Science by Research</u>
2.6	<u>Regulations Governing the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Publication</u>
2.7	<u>Regulations Governing the Degree of Master of Philosophy by Publication</u>
2.8	<u>Regulations Governing the Degree of Master of Arts by Research and Master of Science by Research by Publication</u>
2.9	<u>Regulations Governing the Degree of Doctor of Engineering (EngD)</u>

2.10	Regulations Governing the Degrees of Doctor of Medicine and Master of Surgery
2.11	Regulations Governing the Degree of Doctor of Engineering (EngD) in Offshore Renewable Engineering

3. Assessing Candidates with Disabilities

3.1 Overview

3.1.1 It is the responsibility of students to inform the University if they have a disability, either during application, registration or following the subsequent onset of a disabling condition.

3.1.2 Students experiencing physical or mental impairment need to be assessed by [Disability Advice and Support](#) (Exeter or Cornwall campuses). At this assessment the student's needs will be considered in relation to their programme of study. [Individual Learning Plans](#) (ILPs) will be put in place, which **may** include specific assessment arrangements. Where a student has had a [Disabled Students' Allowance](#) (DSA) following a study needs assessment, the ILP will also detail the recommendations for reasonable adjustments arising from that assessment.

3.2 General Arrangements

3.2.1 Faculties, in consultation with the University's [Disability Advice and Support](#) ([Exeter](#) or [Cornwall](#) campuses) where necessary, **should** comply with the ILP put in place for each individual student by the Disability Advice and Support services. ILPs **may** indicate that adjustments **should** be made either to the requirements specified in the [TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 11: Statement of Procedures: Presentation of theses/dissertations for degrees in the Faculty of Postgraduate Research](#), or to the arrangements for the viva.

3.2.2 Requests for adjustments to the requirements for the presentation of the thesis **should** be made as early as possible in a student's programme of study or following the subsequent onset of a disabling condition.

- 3.2.3 A viva is normally required for doctoral degree examinations but **may**, on exceptional medical or personal grounds, be waived with the express approval of the Dean of Postgraduate Research. Alternative options for holding the viva or deferral of the viva **should** be considered first.
- 3.2.4 No exceptions to the procedures set out in this policy (the Handbook for Examination of Postgraduate Research programmes) **may** be made without the express approval of the [Dean of Postgraduate Research](#), unless it is a reasonable adjustment that has been listed on the approved matrix of common adjustments that **may** be offered (see the [TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 26: Inclusive Practice within Academic Study](#) (Section 4). Where a proposed adjustment is not listed in the matrix, the proposal **must** be discussed between the Disability Services and the [DC Quality Development Team](#).
- 3.2.5 Requests for specific arrangements pertaining to the viva **should** be made via an ILP, prior to submission of the thesis. Requests received after submission cannot be guaranteed to be met. Where adjustments to the examination process are required:
- An NEIC **should** be appointed (see [Section 4.4](#) below).
 - The [PGR Administration Team](#) will inform the Board of Examiners (including the NEIC, where appointed) of the adjustments required for the examination as indicated in the ILP.
- 3.2.6 The NEIC is responsible for taking the ILP into account when making arrangements for the examination.
- 3.2.7 Candidates with short-term injuries/health issues, which are supported by medical evidence, **may** be able to have specific arrangements made for their viva if their injury or health issues have occurred for the first time since submission. They would need to be assessed by or be in contact with [Disability Advice and Support](#) and make a request to the [PGR Administration Team](#). However, these candidates **may** need to have the date of their viva deferred if it is not possible for alternative arrangements to be put in place.

3.2.8 The process for determining what adjustments **may** be made to the viva or the presentation of the thesis are set out in [TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 26: Inclusive Practice within Academic Study](#). Where adjustments are needed the first point of reference **should** be the matrix of common adjustments to viva arrangements.

3.2.9 A disability that has not been declared prior to an assessment cannot be taken into account retrospectively, unless the candidate can provide a reasonable explanation and properly documented evidence for not having declared it (see also the University's procedures for [Student Academic Appeals](#)).

3.3 Further Information

3.3.1 For requirements for Aegrotat Awards see [Ordinance 16: Aegrotat Awards](#).

3.3.2 For requirements for Posthumous Awards see [Ordinance 15: Posthumous Awards](#).

4. Nomination of the Board of Examiners and the Non-Examining Independent Chair

4.1 Boards of Examiners

4.1.1 The Dean of Postgraduate Research appoints all members of the Board of Examiners on behalf of the Board of Postgraduate Research and Senate.

4.1.2 In accordance with the [Ordinances](#), this **must** comprise at least two examiners of whom at least one shall be external to the University. Further specific appointment requirements are set out in this policy, [Section 4.4](#) below.

4.1.3 The Dean of Postgraduate Research is responsible for determining and resolving any conflicts of interest that might arise in the appointment of examiners. Faculties **should** ensure that there are no conflicts of interest in the nomination of examiners and **should** notify the [Dean of Postgraduate Research](#) in any situation where a potential conflict of interest is not otherwise resolvable.

4.2 Timeframe

4.2.1 It is advisable to give early consideration to the nomination of examiners.

4.2.2 Examiner(s) **should** be nominated three months before the expected submission date, via MyPGR.

Programme	Nominator	College Approval	Final Approval
All Postgraduate Research programmes (excluding the DClin Psy)	Lead Supervisor	Faculty Director of PGR (or nominee)	Dean of Postgraduate Research
DClinPsy	Research Director	Faculty Director of PGR (or nominee)	Dean of Postgraduate Research

4.2.3 For candidates for whom submission in an alternative format has been approved, see [TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 11: Statement of Procedures: Presentation of theses/dissertations for degrees in the Faculty of Postgraduate Research](#) (Section 3), it is important to ensure that examiners are appointed as early as possible, to ensure that an appropriate Board of Examiners **may** be nominated.

4.3 Nominator Responsibilities

4.3.1 The responsibilities of those nominating examiners are:

- To give early consideration to the appointment of the Board of Examiners giving consideration to the criteria for nomination (see [section 4.5](#) below).
- To discuss with their Faculty DPGR (or nominee) any nominations where the eligibility of the nominees in question is not clear.
- To informally approach all nominees prior to their formal appointment to elicit informal agreement to take up the appointment should their nomination be confirmed.
- To maintain contact with the Board of Examiners prior to submission of the thesis, to ensure that the examiners are aware of any potential delays in the date of submission.

- e. To ensure that they have sufficient information about the nominees to allow them to complete the nomination process, including a copy of the proposed External Examiner's CV, which **should** be uploaded to [MyPGR](#) as part of the nomination, unless the examiner has previously been approved for a prior examination at the University.

4.4 Specific appointment requirements

Circumstance	Examiner Requirements	Examiner Requirements	NEIC Requirements
	Internal	External	
Examination of postgraduate research degree students under normal circumstances (where the circumstances are not detailed in this table)	At least one internal examiner must be appointed ¹ .	At least one external examiner must be appointed.	An NEIC must be appointed where the criteria listed in 4.5 (below) confirm that one is required.
<p>By publication programmes</p> <p>AND</p> <p>Examination of staff members*</p> <p>*This applies if a candidate is appointed to an academic position at any point prior to the award of the degree the only exception to this being where a candidate is appointed to an academic position after receipt of the report of the Board of Examiners where the outcome is pass or minor amendments.</p>	<p>At least one internal examiner should be appointed.</p> <p>See column 'NEIC requirements' for exceptions to this requirement.</p>	<p>Two external examiners must be appointed.</p> <p>Where the Faculty DPGR (or nominee) is satisfied that the role of the staff member is such that undue pressure would not be placed on the examiners if only one external were appointed, approval for the appointment of only one external examiner may be sought from the Dean of Postgraduate Research.</p> <p>Where the Faculty DPGR (or nominee) is satisfied that a candidate, who is registered as a member of staff for stipendiary purposes, is not required to undertake any duties concomitant with appointment as a member of staff they may make a note of this when recommending the nomination in MyPGR and recommend to the Dean of Postgraduate Research the appointment of one external examiner only.</p>	<p>In the case of candidates who hold positions within the academic job families in their Faculty for whom no appropriate internal examiner can be appointed, an NEIC must be appointed who will also undertake those administrative duties, which would normally fall to the internal examiner.</p>

¹ Where more than one internal examiner is deemed necessary (and confirmed by the Dean of Postgraduate Research), one will be considered the 'lead' internal examiner with additional responsibilities detailed throughout this handbook.

Circumstance	Examiner Requirements	Examiner Requirements	NEIC Requirements
	Internal	External	
Theses submitted in an alternative format (see TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 11: Presentation of theses/ dissertations for PGR degrees)	<p>At least one internal examiner must be appointed.</p> <p>The requirements specified under 'examination of staff members' above apply where a member of staff is submitting a thesis in an alternative format.</p> <p>The requirements specified under 'by publication programmes' above apply where a candidate is submitting a thesis in an alternative format for a by publication degree.</p>	<p>At least one external examiner must be appointed.</p> <p>The requirements specified under 'examination of staff members' above apply where a member of staff is submitting a thesis in an alternative format.</p> <p>The requirements specified under 'by publication programmes' above apply where a candidate is submitting a thesis in an alternative format for a by publication degree.</p>	An NEIC must always be appointed.
Thesis submitted in an alternate language (see TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 11: Presentation of theses/ dissertations for PGR degrees)	In addition to the criteria listed in 4.5 (below) the Board of Examiners must be fluent in the language in which the thesis has been submitted and that in which the viva will be conducted.		The NEIC must be familiar with the language in question.
Adjustments to the examination process are due to be made as a result of a student's ILP (see Section 3 above)			An NEIC should be appointed, unless reasonable justification can be given to the Dean of Postgraduate Research as to why this is not necessary, e.g. where the adjustments are minor and routine.

4.5 Criteria for Nomination

4.5.1 Examiners **must** be sufficiently expert to enable them to make an assessment of the thesis against the assessment outcomes for that programme. The external examiners **should** be sufficient experts in the field of study, whilst an internal examiner need only be expert in the broader disciplinary field.

4.5.2 Where the suitability of a nomination is not immediately apparent, the case **must** be made as part of the nomination process in MyPGR to the Dean of Postgraduate Research as to why the nominee is the most appropriate. Where such a case is approved an NEIC **may** be required.

4.5.3. Examiner nominations should comply with the following requirements	External	Internal
Employment status		
Hold a post at senior lecturer level or above. An examiner who does not comply with this requirement may be appointed, but in such cases an NEIC should be appointed.	Yes	n/a
Work at a research intensive organisation ² with consideration given to the bearing that might have on their familiarity with postgraduate research; An examiner who does not comply with this requirement may be appointed, but in such cases an NEIC should be appointed.	Yes	n/a
May be employed at an organisation based outside of the UK.	Yes	n/a

² No single listing of 'research-led' Universities would be useful globally: external examiner nominations are welcome from research-led Universities wherever they are based, however for institutions within the UK, membership of the sector group representing research-led Universities is a useful check to the status of an institution: the Russell Group.

Should have a contract of employment ³ with the University. Consideration should be given to the expected end date of the contract of employment of nominated internal examiners, to ensure that there is a reasonable expectation that they will continue to have a contract of employment with the University for the duration of the examination process.	No	Yes
Individuals engaged on a self-employed/consultancy basis or on a claims basis by the University, or who have an honorary appointment at the University. With the exception of members of NHS staff who have an honorary appointment with the University, who may be considered for appointment as an internal examiner.	No	No
Must either be able to take lead supervisor responsibilities as specified in the Code of Good Practice - Arrangement for the Supervision of Research Degree Students (Chapter 3), or: Be able to demonstrate successful supervision (as lead supervisor) of a student through to completion within the last 5 years, either prior to appointment in their current role, or as a member of any of the following groups: i) Education and Scholarship job family. ii) Research job family, including on a fixed term contract. iii) Education and Research job family on a fixed term contract.	n/a	Yes
May be an emeritus professor at a research-led University, provided their CV demonstrates that they remain research-active. <u>Internal examiners:</u> A Faculty may make a case to the Dean of Postgraduate Research for the appointment of an emeritus professor as an internal examiner. Where approval is given, detailed approval would not need to be sought for additional appointments of that individual as an internal examiner for one year from the date of the approval. Faculties must appoint an NEIC in such instances.	Yes	No (see note)
May be a visiting professor at a research-led University.	Yes	No

³ For the avoidance of doubt, individuals engaged on a self-employed/consultancy basis and individuals engaged on a claims basis are not eligible to act as Internal Examiners.

Experience		
Should have previously supervised to completion at the level of the award in question or at a higher level. An examiner without such experience may be appointed, but in such cases an NEIC must be appointed.	Yes (see note)	Yes (see note)
At least one member of the Board of Examiners must have previously examined at the level of the award in question or at a higher level.	Yes	Yes
Should have previously examined at the level of the award of in question or at a higher level at the University of Exeter. An examiner without such experience may be appointed, but in such cases an NEIC should be appointed, unless reasonable justification can be given to the Dean of Postgraduate Research as to why this is not necessary. Reasonable justification should normally comprise evidence of completion of the relevant internal training related to examination of PGR theses (further guidance can be found in the University's EduExe Toolkit) and evidence of relevant examining experience within the UK.	n/a	Yes (see note)
May have sat on the candidate's Upgrade Committee	n/a	Yes

4.6 Non-Examining Independent Chair appointment requirements

4.6.1 Non-Examining Independent Chairs (NEIC) **should**:

- a. Have a contract of employment⁴ with the University;
- b. Either be able to take lead supervisor responsibilities as specified in the [TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 3: Code of Good Practice – Arrangement for the Supervision of Postgraduate Research Degree Students](#), or be able to demonstrate successful supervision (as lead supervisor) of a student through to completion within the last 5 years, as a member of any of the following groups:
 - i. Education and Scholarship job family.
 - ii. Research job family, including on a fixed term contract.
 - iii. Education and Research job family on a fixed term contract.
- c. Have previously supervised to completion at the level of the award in question or at a higher level.
- d. Have previously examined at the University of Exeter at the level of the award in question or at a higher level.

4.7 Declarations of interest

- 4.7.1 Departments **should** disclose details of any situations which have the potential to impair the ability of the examiner(s) to make a fair and impartial assessment of the student's thesis, or for the NEIC to participate in the examination. Where there is a conflict of interest, or the perception of a conflict of interest applies, the person in question **should not** be appointed as an examiner or NEIC, unless exceptional circumstances can be proven.

⁴ For the avoidance of doubt, individuals engaged on a self-employed/consultancy basis and individuals engaged on a claims basis are not eligible to act as Internal Examiners.

4.7.2 A non-exhaustive list of potential sources of conflict, where approval to proceed with a nomination is unlikely to be granted outside of exceptional circumstance, is provided below:

- a. The nominated examiner's substantial involvement in the student's research, including former or current supervisors or paper co-authors of the candidate.
- b. A close personal relationship between the nominated examiner and the candidate, supervisor, other nominated examiners or NEIC (if nominated) sponsor, relative, partner or friend of the candidate.
- c. In cases where the student's research has involved collaboration with or funding of research by an external party, the nominated examiner or NEIC not being independent of that relationship.
- d. Nominated examiner or NEIC having direct commercial interest in the outcomes of the research.
- e. An examiner or NEIC will manage or mentor the PGR at postdoctoral level and/or has recently been on a hiring committee for the PGR.
- f. The external or NEIC is currently an external examiner for a taught element of a professional doctorate that the student is currently enrolled on.
- g. **External Examiners only:** Former members of staff of the University who left the University within 5 years of the date of their proposed nomination.
- h. **External Examiners only:** A member of staff, from a research or commercial organisation, where they are involved with the University in a collaborative provision arrangement under which the candidate in question is studying.
- i. **External Examiners only:** there exists a formal relationship between the external examiner and the department which might have meant working with the PGR (e.g. honorary visiting professor in same research group).

4.7.3 A non-exhaustive list of potential sources of conflict, where approval to proceed with a nomination **may** be considered, is provided below. In order to proceed with a conflict from this list, or a conflict under similar circumstances, a clear justification given as to why this is the most appropriate appointment, and how the conflict will be mitigated **must** be provided and approved by the Faculty DPGR prior to appointment:

- a. Nominated examiner or NEIC who was the supervisor or supervisee of the candidate's supervisor or was examined themselves by the candidate's supervisor.
- b. Current or former mentors or PGR Pastoral Tutors of the candidate provided there has been no individual engagement between the staff member and candidate and confirmed by both parties.
- c. Close professional relationship between the nominated examiner and the candidate, supervisor, other nominated examiner or NEIC, for example, current joint holding of grants, co-authorship of papers within the 5 years prior to appointment. The size of the field, level of closeness of the collaboration and time since collaboration will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- d. Involvement on large, multi-authored papers between examiners, supervisors and/or the NEIC where there is no substantive engagement between the examiner and the candidate's doctoral research.

4.7.4 The following non-exhaustive list of examples would not normally constitute conflicts of interest:

- a. the internal was a member of the candidate's upgrade panel.
- b. the external has met the PGR at conferences.
- c. the external knows the supervisor or internal examiner but no collaboration or co-authorship.

- d. the external is a member of the same professional association or body as the supervisor or internal examiner.
- e. the external examiner is also an examiner for a taught degree programme in the department, provided the candidate is not also enrolled on the same programme.
- f. the external examiner examined the PGR in a taught programme.
- g. the external examiner examined the PGR in another research programme, e.g. Masters by Research, (and at least three years have elapsed since then)
- h. The examiner's work being the subject of the research.

4.7.5 It is the responsibility of the candidate, supervisory team, proposed examiners and NEIC (where nominated) to declare any circumstance which might lead to a conflict of interest or the perception of such.

4.7.6 The existence of a potential conflict of interest **should** not necessarily be a bar to the appointment of a nominated examiner or NEIC. However, departments, examiners and students are required to declare any potential conflicts which **may** affect the integrity of the examination process at the point of nomination, or as soon as reasonably possible in the case of situations that only become apparent after examiners have been appointed.

4.7.7 Exceptional appointments where there are conflicts/perceived conflicts.

- a. Where a case can be made for their appointment under section **4.7.3** above, the Department Director of Postgraduate Research (or nominee) **must** submit a rationale for the appointment to the **Faculty Director of Postgraduate Research** providing information to explain why the appointment would not lead to the perception of a conflict of interest. The written consent of the PGR student and nominated examiner/NEIC to the arrangement would need to be given prior to confirmation of any appointment.

- b. Where a case can be made for their appointment under section **4.7.2** above, the **Department Director of Postgraduate Research** (or nominee) **must** submit a rationale for the appointment to the Dean of Postgraduate Research providing information to explain why the appointment would not lead to the perception of a conflict of interest. The written consent of the PGR student and nominated examiner/NEIC to the arrangement would need to be given prior to confirmation of any appointment.
- c. See also the University's 'Code of Professional Conduct: [Relations between Staff and Students](#) and [Relations between Staff](#)'.

4.7.8 Faculty and Department DPGRs are not automatically precluded from examining students within their Faculty/Department but **should** consider in all instances whether the nature of the contact that they have had with the student in question could lead to a conflict of interest or the perception of such and seek advice accordingly.

4.7.9 In any case where a person is unsure about whether a circumstance might constitute a conflict of interest the onus is on that person to declare it or in the first instance seek advice from the Department Director of PGR (or FDPGR if the DDPGR is nominated for the examination). **Should** it be determined that there is a conflict of interest or the perception of such it would only be under exceptional circumstances that the examination would continue without change.

5. Non-Examining Independent Chair

5.1 Role

5.1.1 The Non-Examining Independent Chair (NEIC) **should**:

- a. ensure that the University's procedures with regard to the examination of degrees by research are followed.
- b. ensure consistency and fairness throughout the examination.

- c. provide additional information if, following a viva, an appeal is lodged by the candidate.
- d. preside over the Board of Examiners.
- e. provide support and mentorship to inexperienced examiners; proactively acting as a source of advice with regard to any queries the examiners **may** have about the examination process itself throughout the process, whether or not a viva takes place.
- f. provide a report on the conduct of the examination if required.
- g. In the case of a viva by video-link, additional duties of the NEIC are set out in section 7.5, below.

5.1.2 This role is distinct to that of the Board of Examiners in that:

- a. The NEIC does not take any part in the assessment of the quality of the thesis and **should not** therefore have read the thesis.
- b. The NEIC need not be a subject expert, nor even a member of the discipline.
- c. The NEIC does not normally take responsibility for organising the viva (this is normally the responsibility of the lead internal examiner).

5.1.3 Because of the responsibilities that they can undertake and because of the quality assurance that they can provide, it is advisable to nominate an NEIC in addition to the examiners where circumstances allow.

5.2 Circumstances of appointment of an NEIC

5.2.1 See section 4.5 'criteria for nomination' which details circumstances under which an NEIC is a requirement. The Dean of Postgraduate Research **may** also require that an NEIC be appointed.

5.3 Criteria for appointment of an NEIC

5.3.1 See [section 4.6](#) 'Non-Examining Independent Chair appointment requirements'.

5.3.2 See [section 4.7](#) 'Declarations of interest'.

6. Before the Examination

6.1 Distribution of the Thesis

6.1.1 The examiners will receive electronic copies of the thesis from the [Postgraduate Administration Office](#), (and other formats as appropriate or upon request).

6.1.2 Examiners **should** retain their copies of the thesis until the examination is complete.

6.1.3 When a candidate has submitted in an alternative format, upon receipt of the thesis the lead internal examiner **may** liaise with the supervisor to ensure that the Board of Examiners fully understand the agreed submission guidelines (attached to the submitted thesis) prior to completion of the preliminary reports.

6.2 Scheduling the Viva

6.2.1 The lead Internal Examiner **should** liaise with all those attending the viva to ensure the viva is scheduled to take place within 3 months of the candidate's submission. See [Section 6.3.4](#) below for further information, where a viva is not an automatic requirement.

6.2.2 All members of the Board of Examiners and the NEIC (where appointed) **should** respond to communications from the lead internal to facilitate arrangement of the viva, where held.

6.2.3 The lead Internal Examiner **should** ensure that they are aware of, and take into account, any adjustments to the examination process that might need to be made resulting from a student's ILP, prior to scheduling the viva.

6.3 Preliminary Reports

- 6.3.1 All members of the Board of Examiners **should** complete and independent preliminary report. Each examiner, whether internal or external, is required to prepare in writing a preliminary report on the thesis to inform the conduct of the examination. Each report, to be submitted on a pro forma provided by the University, **should** reflect the examiner's preliminary view of the thesis, relating that opinion to the candidate's success or failure in meeting the criteria for the award in question.
- 6.3.2 All completed preliminary reports **should** be completed separately and independently, and returned to the [PGR Administration Team](#) in the timeframes stipulated in 6.3.5a and 6.3.5bi below.
- 6.3.3 Examiners **should not** share their preliminary reports with each other, instead they will receive the reports from the [PGR Administration Team](#) within the timeframes stipulated in 6.3.5a and 6.3.5b.i below.
- 6.3.4 The Board of Examiners **should** consider the preliminary reports of all members of the Board.
- 6.3.5 Where a viva is not an automatic requirement:
- a. As vivas **should** take place within 3 months of submission, lead internal examiners are advised to schedule the viva prior to confirmation that it is needed. The examiners are then responsible for completing their preliminary reports and returning to the [PGR Administration Team](#) within a maximum of 10 weeks of submission. The [PGR Administration Team](#) will send the reports to the internal and external examiners who are responsible for liaising over the outcomes of the report within 2 months of submission to confirm whether or not the viva is required.
 - b. See also [section 8.9](#) 'Completing the report of the Board of Examiners' below.
 - i. The examiners are responsible for completing their preliminary reports and returning to the [PGR Administration Team](#) within a maximum of 10 weeks of submission.

- ii. The [PGR Administration Team](#) will circulate the reports to the Board of Examiners at least a week in advance of the viva.
- iii. The NEIC (where appointed) **should** provide support to the lead internal examiner and liaise with the [PGR Administration Team](#) to ensure that the process is running smoothly, and that any questions they **may** have with regard to the reports or implications for the viva are addressed.

6.3.6 Students do not receive a copy of the preliminary report⁵, and therefore examiners **should** be aware that any amendments identified as recommendations at the preliminary report stage that are pertinent to the final amendments specified by the examiners for completion will need to be clearly included within the final Board of Examiners' report (see [section 8.9](#), below).

⁵ Students are however, entitled to request a copy of the report via a Subject Access Request under the Data Protection Act 2018

7. The Examination

7.1 When is a viva required?

Stage of submission	First submission		Resubmission ⁶	
Requirements	MbyRes/MPhil	Doctoral programmes	MbyRes/MPhil	Doctoral programmes
A viva must always be held	No	Yes	No	No
A viva examination is judged to be necessary by one or more of the examiners	Yes	n/a	Yes	Yes
There is substantial disagreement between the examiners	Yes	n/a	Yes	Yes
The examiners are inclined to make a recommendation other than award of the degree for which the work was submitted (such as major amendments or resubmission). In such circumstances, the examiners may still require the satisfactory completion of minor amendments appropriate to the award in question.	Yes	n/a	Yes	Yes

When reviewing minor, major or outstanding amendments, the Board of Examiners reach their recommendations without holding a viva.

⁶ See [Section 8.5](#) for the definition of a 'resubmission'.

7.2 Purpose of the viva

7.2.1 The examination of research degrees focuses on the candidate's 'thesis', which is the claim, position or proposition that the candidate discusses, advances and justifies. In the examination process, the thesis **may** be presented in both written and oral form. The oral examination is traditionally called a 'viva voce', meaning 'by or with the living voice', referred to as a 'viva'. The viva fulfils two key purposes in the examination process in that it provides an opportunity for the Board of Examiners to determine whether the thesis:

- a. Is the work of the candidate, by assessing the thoroughness of the candidate's understanding of the thesis (as submitted in written form) and the candidate's ability to justify the thesis.
- b. Meets the assessment criteria for the award in question, by assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis and its justification, as well as the candidate's knowledge of the relevant academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice, and understanding of relevant theories, concepts and research techniques.

7.2.2 Thereby, the viva examination provides candidates with an opportunity to talk about their thesis with experts in the field and to receive feedback from them.

7.2.3 All vivas are different, but they normally follow a question-and-answer format. The questions can address any aspect of the submission, and there is no minimum or maximum number of questions that might be asked. The nature and quantity of questions **should** be sufficient to enable the viva to fulfil the two purposes outlined in 7.2.1 above. By the end of the viva, the Board of Examiners **should** be able to determine whether the thesis is the work of the candidate, and whether it is of the standard to merit the award of the degree for which it has been submitted. If there are concerns as to whether or not the thesis is the work of the candidate, the examiners **should** refer to [The TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 13: Procedure for Graduate Research Students suspected of Research Misconduct](#).

7.2.4 If the thesis is not of the standard to merit the relevant award, formative feedback **must** be provided in the Examiners' Report, specifying why the written submission does not meet the relevant assessment criteria and detailing how it **should** be revised so that it does meet the criteria (see [section 8.9](#)). The dialogue between the Board of Examiners and the candidate during the viva can inform the preparation of the Examiners' Report to ensure good quality formative feedback is provided.

7.3 Attendance at the viva

7.3.1 Only the following people **should** normally be in attendance:

- a. The candidate,
- b. The Board of Examiners,
- c. The NEIC, where appointed,
- d. A member of the supervisory team (normally the lead supervisor) as a non-participant observer where they have been invited to do so by the candidate,
- e. The Dean of Postgraduate Research **may** give permission for additional people, in a non-examining role, to be present at the examination to ensure fairness and consistency. The viva **must not** go ahead if written permission from the Dean of PGR has not been obtained ahead of the viva. Any additional attendees will be appointed for a specific purpose and **must** attend as a non-participating observer, e.g., to fulfil the requirements of an ILP.

7.3.2 A viva **must not** proceed without all the examiners and Non-Examining Independent Chair (when appointed) being present. If one of the examiners or the NEIC is unable to attend, the viva **should** be postponed and where necessary consideration given to revising the membership of the Board of Examiners (for example where a panel member will be unavailable for an extended period of time)⁷.

7.3.3 The lead internal examiner or the NEIC (where appointed) **should** chair the viva.

⁷ If the appointed NEIC is unable to attend, the Faculty should arrange for a substitute NEIC to take their place. If there is not time for the appointment to be approved, the Faculty should ensure that the substitute NEIC is someone who has previously undertaken the NEIC role: as they are not an examiner they need not be a subject expert.

7.3.4 Audio, audio-visual or transcript recordings of the viva **should not** be taken by anyone attending the viva, whether they are active participants or not.

7.3.5 Attendance of a member of the supervisory team:

- a. Candidates **may** invite one member of their supervisory team to attend their viva. The supervisor would be there in support of the candidate as a non-participant observer, and to enable them to better provide supervision of that candidate **should** the candidate be required to complete amendments or resubmit their thesis.

However, the following requirements apply:

- b. Whilst supervisors **should** make every effort to attend the viva **should** they be invited to do so; candidates **must** be minded that it may be difficult for their supervisor to do so unless they are invited to attend the viva prior to the organisation of the viva by the lead internal examiner. Confirmation that a supervisor has been invited to attend the viva **should** normally be included on the student's thesis submission form. Where a decision to invite the supervisor to attend the viva is made after submission the [Postgraduate Administration Team](#) **should** be informed by the student. The [Postgraduate Administration Team](#) will inform the examiners of the request.
- c. No more than one member of the supervisory team **may** attend the viva, in order not to unbalance the viva. This **should** normally be the lead supervisor, as they will take key responsibility for supporting the candidates with any amendments required.
- d. The supervisor **should** only be present at the viva in the presence of the candidate. They **must** retire with the candidate for any private deliberations of the Board of Examiners.
- e. A supervisor **should** be present as an observer only. They **should not** take any active part in the proceedings the only exception being after the Board of

Examiners has announced their recommendations and the viva has formally ended (see 'Following the return of the candidate in [section 7.7](#) 'Agenda' below), at which point they **may**, in consultation with the candidate, ensure that they both have a clear understanding of any amendments outlined by the Board of Examiners at this stage.

- f. A supervisor who is attending a viva **must** attend for the duration of the viva (with the exception of 7.3.5d, above). See also 'Agenda', below.
- g. A candidate **should not** invite anybody other than their supervisor to attend their viva. The viva **must not** go ahead if additional attendees are present without the written permission given by the Dean of PGR ahead of the viva.

7.4 Arrangements for the viva

7.4.1 The viva **should** be conducted in an appropriate, comfortable location where the probability of interruptions occurring is minimal and where any reasonable adjustments recommended by a candidate's Individual Learning Plan (ILP) can be accommodated.

7.4.2 In arranging the viva, consideration **should** be given to any reasonable adjustments detailed in a candidate's ILP.

7.4.3 If a student or the Board of Examiners have any questions about the reasonable adjustments proposed in an ILP, they **must** discuss with the [PGR Administration Team](#) before the viva takes place. Further guidance around the implementation of an ILP, and what to do if there is uncertainty around any proposed adjustments, is available in the [TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 26, Inclusive Practice within Academic Study](#).

7.4.4 The candidate **should** confirm their identity at the start of the viva (by producing their UnicaID, or other photo ID, such as a passport). The viva **must not** proceed without this confirmation.

7.4.5 Length of the viva, including breaks:

Programme	Maximum
Doctoral degrees with the exception of the DClinPsy	4 hours
MRes, MPhil and DClinPsy	3 hours

7.4.6 Vivas **must not** extend beyond the maximum time-frames indicated. The Chair of the viva **may** offer short comfort breaks at the request of the candidate or other participants and **must** offer participants a 15-minute break after the end of 2 hours.

7.5 Vivas by video-conference

7.5.1 This section applies to all vivas where one or more participant joins the viva via a video-link.

7.5.2 The University has adopted a permissive approach to the use of vivas by video-link, recognising that vivas **may** be held as successfully by video-link as a viva where all participants are physically in the same room. When making decisions about whether attendance by one or more participant at the viva **should** take place via video-link, rather than travelling to attend in person, the University's '[Environment & Climate Emergency Business Travel Policy](#)' **should** be adhered to with regard to prioritising low carbon solutions such as video-link attendance. Holding a viva by video-link might present opportunities to nominate external examiners whose attendance, by dint of their location, might otherwise be unviable. It **may** also be a preferable option for students, e.g. on financial grounds, or to satisfy the reasonable adjustments of an ILP.

7.5.3 The Faculty is responsible for taking all reasonable steps to ensure that the examination process is equitable and **should** be mindful of the latest advice available from IT Services with regard to holding meetings online. In determining whether or not it is appropriate to conduct any viva by video-link, the Faculty **must** be able to have confidence that:

- a. The Examiners will be able to assure themselves that the thesis is the candidate's own work.

- b. The technology is sufficient to enable a viva to take place without limiting communications and that arrangements will be made to postpone the viva if this is not the case.
- c. All participants are able to access an appropriate, comfortable location for the viva, whether on or off-campus, where the probability of interruptions occurring is minimal. To facilitate this, participants based off-campus **should** be reminded of the need to ensure that they have refreshments and have made appropriate arrangements for their comfort. Where multiple participants are in one location the lead internal examiner remains responsible for ensuring that the location is appropriate, but **may** seek guidance from the [PGR Support Team](#) in so doing;
- d. Where an ILP is in place, any reasonable adjustments can be complied with (see also [section 3](#)).
- e. The PGR Support Team **may** consider that the Faculty has provided *de facto* confirmation that it is has confidence in the format of the viva by virtue that no participant has raised concerns in advance about any of these points. Specific approval from the Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellor (or nominee) is required where:
 - i. An ILP is in place, to ensure that appropriate adjustments can be made;
 - ii. Or any concerns have been raised about proceeding with the viva by those attending the viva with regard to points 7.5.3a – 7.5.3c, above.

7.5.4 Addressing these points means that:

- a. All viva participants (all members of the Board of Examiners, the NEIC (where appointed) and the candidate) **must** confirm in writing if it is not feasible for the viva to proceed in this way and confirm at the conclusion of the viva that the holding of the examination by video-link has had no substantive bearing on the examination process. This confirmation **must** be recorded in the Examiner's Report (see [section 8.9](#)).

- b. Lead internal Examiners **should** contact their [PGR Support Team](#) regarding the organisation of vivas by video-link, but **should** note that the PGR Support Team are unable to make the arrangements for the viva.
- c. Participants **may** join the viva from multiple locations, but the platform **should** be tested with all participants ahead of the viva, and approval **should** always be subject to confirmation of a successful test.
- d. Where a member of the Board of Examiners will be at a separate site, consideration **should** be given to their need to consult privately with the other members of the Board of Examiners (and the NEIC, where appointed) on the conduct of the examination. The arrangements for managing the candidate (and supervisor, where relevant) joining/leaving/re-joining the meeting **should** be set out in advance of the viva.
- e. Where a candidate is joining a viva by video-link from an off-campus location, costs incurred for the use of resources elsewhere **should** be met by the candidate provided these costs are made explicit at the point at which the decision is made to hold the viva by videoconference.
- f. The Board of Examiners **should** be mindful of the risk that the viva **may** need to be halted and **should** ensure that it agrees an approach to record-keeping during the viva discussions to ensure that the viva could be recommenced successfully at a later date.
- g. The NEIC, or lead internal examiner where an NEIC has not been appointed, will be responsible for:
 - i. Halting the viva in the event that the technology fails or is significantly interrupted or is of a poor quality such that participants are not able to fully engage in the viva. This **may** include halting the viva at the request of the candidate, if there are any indications of problems with the technology being used.

- ii. If the viva is halted, confirming in writing to all participants that the viva has been postponed as soon as possible, and thereafter confirming whether the viva **should** be restarted at a later date or recommenced from the point at which it was halted. If the viva is halted at the beginning it **should** be restarted. If a viva is halted once the viva is underway, arrangements will normally need to be made to allow the viva to recommence from roughly the point at which it halted at a later date, however, the NEIC or lead internal examiner will be responsible for making a judgement on whether the viva **should** recommence later or would need to be restarted completely.
- iii. Verifying the candidate's identity by checking ID that the candidate presents on camera to the Examination Board (see [section 7.4.2](#)).
- iv. Keeping a record and reporting to their Faculty DPGR in the first instance **should** anyone present be unable to confirm that the holding of the examination via video-link had no substantive bearing on the examination process. This confirmation **must** be recorded in the Examiner's Report (see [section 8.9](#)).
- v. Ensuring that all participants confirm that they have not kept a recording of the viva.
- vi. In cases where unexpected technological problems halts the viva: informing the [Postgraduate Administration Team](#) at the earliest opportunity.

7.5.5 The [PGR Support Team](#) **must** keep records of the decision to hold a viva by video-link, including the approval of the Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellor (or nominee) where required, and **should** lodge a copy of the approval with the [Postgraduate Administration Team](#) who will keep a central record of all instances where approval has been given for an examination to be conducted by video-conference to ensure consistency of approach.

7.6 Language of the viva

7.6.1 All vivas **must** be held in English unless the candidate has been given permission to submit their thesis in an alternate language (see [TQA PGR Handbook: Chapter 11, Presentation of Thesis](#) (Section 4 'Language of Thesis'). If they have been given such permission the viva **may** be conducted in English and/or the language of submission as appropriate, and as agreed in advance by the examiners in consultation with the candidate (see [Section 4.4](#)).

7.7 Viva Agenda

7.7.1 The following sets out a basic agenda for the viva. The viva **may** be conducted in accordance with this agenda.

7.7.2 Prior to the arrival of the candidate and their supervisor (where attending):

- a. Introductions
- b. Confirmation that all examiners (and the NEIC, where present) have received and understand the regulations for the award in question along with this policy, the 'Handbook for Examination of Postgraduate Research Programmes'.
- c. Confirmation that all examiners have copies of the examiners' preliminary reports.
- d. Outline by the lead internal examiner (or NEIC, where present) of the viva schedule and process, such as the expectations regarding viva length and the process for informing the candidate of the preliminary outcome of the examination and a reminder that the viva **should** not be recorded.
- e. Confirmation by the examiners of priority areas about which the examiners wish to ask questions and discussion of the order of questions.
- f. (where applicable) Confirmation by the NEIC with the Board of Examiners that any reasonable adjustments required to the viva, as confirmed by the student's ILP, will be adhered to. Where necessary, the NEIC **should** confirm how adjustments will be

managed throughout the viva and whether the responsibility for ensuring that adjustments are followed lies with everyone in the examination or just the NEIC.

7.7.3 Following the arrival of the candidate:

- a. Introductions (led by the lead internal examiner, or the NEIC, where present).
- b. Confirmation of the candidate's identity (led by the lead internal examiner, or the NEIC, where present).
- c. Housekeeping (led by the lead internal examiner, or the NEIC, where present).
- d. Explaining the process of the viva to the candidate, what happens at the end of it and a reminder that the viva **should** not be recorded by any attendees (led by the lead internal examiners, or the NEIC, where present).
- e. Questions (led by the examiners, the NEIC **must not** participate in the questioning of the candidate).
- f. Conclusions – providing information to the candidate on what will happen next; confirming that the candidate is satisfied that they were given a fair chance to defend their thesis (led by the lead internal examiner, or the NEIC, where present), offer the candidate an opportunity to return to the viva location after the Board's private discussion to receive preliminary feedback (if the Board feels it is appropriate).
- g. ILP confirmation (where applicable) all participants **should** confirm that they are satisfied that any reasonable adjustments in the student's ILP, which are relevant to the examination, have been followed to the satisfaction of all attendees. If anyone is not satisfied that this is the adjustments have not been followed, this **must** be raised to the [Postgraduate Administration Team](#) immediately following the viva.

7.7.4 Following the departure of the candidate:

- a. Initial consideration of whether or not the thesis is the work of the candidate and whether it meets the assessment criteria for the award in question (see [section 7.2](#) 'Purpose of the Viva').

7.7.5 Following the return of the candidate (optional):

- a. Disclaimer (led by the lead internal examiner, or the NEIC, where present) to explain that these are only preliminary recommendations, in accordance with the following principle:

The Board of Examiners **may** if they choose, inform the candidate of their preliminary recommendations. However, in doing so it **must** be made absolutely clear to all concerned that this **may not** be the final recommendation that the Board of Examiners makes in its written report.

Furthermore, this will be a recommendation only, which the Board of Examiners **may** be asked to amend by either the Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellor or the Dean of Postgraduate Research.

Candidates **should** be aware that until they receive formal confirmation of the outcome via the formal examiners' report from the [Postgraduate Administration Team](#) any information received is only provisional.

- b. Preliminary notification and explanation of recommendations (if this is felt to be appropriate) and of the nature of the amendments likely to be required in order for the thesis to meet the criteria for the award in question.

Candidates **should** be aware that until they receive formal confirmation of the required amendments via the formal examiners' report from the [Postgraduate Administration Team](#) any information received is only provisional.

7.7.6 Ending the viva: (led by the lead internal examiner, or the NEIC, where present) to provide confirmation that the viva is formally complete. This **may** either be confirmed as part of step 7.7.3b above, if the candidate is not returning or **should** take place at the end of step 7.7.5 above, if the candidate has returned.

7.8 Sickness or absence before or during the viva

- 7.8.1 Students who are unwell leading up to, or during the examination and are therefore unable to continue with the examination **should** refer to the [TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 18: PGR Student Absence Policy](#).

8. After the Examination

8.1 Recommendations of the Board of Examiners

- 8.1.1 Sections 8.2 – 8.8 detail the possible outcomes of the PGR examination process.
- 8.1.2 Note that not all outcomes are available for all awards; programme specific information is available in [section 2](#).
- 8.1.3 Note that not all outcomes are available at all stages of examination. The relevant examiners' report will contain details about the outcomes available at each stage of examination.

8.2 Award

- 8.2.1 The examiners **must** be agreed that the thesis fully meets the assessment criteria for the award in question without requiring any additional work.

8.3 Minor Amendments

- 8.3.1 Minor amendments **should** be recommended for:
- a. the correction of typographical, spelling and grammatical errors and;
 - b. limited revisions of material in the thesis. This **may** include limited revisions not central to the thesis, omissions, and improvements to the argument which do not materially alter the conclusions.
- 8.3.2 The examiners **must** be agreed that the candidate will be able to complete the amendments necessary for the thesis to meet the assessment criteria for the award in question within twelve weeks of notification and without the need of a further viva examination.

8.4 Major Amendments

8.4.1 Major amendments **should** be recommended for:

- a. More extensive revisions than that implied by a decision of minor amendments;
- b. Revisions that will not normally require any significant extension of the original research to be undertaken (In such instances, resubmission would normally be necessary).

8.4.2 The examiners **must** be agreed that the candidate will be able to complete the amendments necessary for the thesis to meet the assessment criteria for the award in question within no more than six months from notification and **may** be able to set an earlier date if they are agreed that the revisions they are requesting make this feasible.

8.5 Resubmission

8.5.1 Resubmission **should** be recommended when a thesis has failed the first examination for the award for which it was submitted.

8.5.2 Examiners **must** provide combined guidance to the student on any required amendments for a resubmission. It is not expected that examiners should list in detail every amendment to be made, particularly when the revisions required involve major improvements in the depth, intellectual quality, analysis, argument or structure of the thesis, but the guidance must clearly set out the full range of improvements needed and must give appropriate direction so that the student is able to make the necessary changes to fulfil the award criteria.

8.5.3 Changes that are only suggestions for improvement and are not required to meet the award criteria **must** clearly be listed separately from the main list of amendments.

8.5.4 In requiring the resubmission of a thesis for re-examination examiners **must** indicate the maximum period in which this work should be undertaken. The maximum period **must not** be more than 18 months for all Doctoral awards (excluding the DClinPsy) and 12

months for Masters awards and the DClínPsy. Where the Board of Examiners recommend a resubmission period shorter than the maximum, the rationale for the shorter period **must** be clearly justified by the Board of Examiners in the report.

8.6 Recommendation of a lower award

8.6.1 Following submission of minor, major, outstanding amendments or resubmission, the Examiners **may** recommend the award of a lower qualification than that for which the candidate submitted (where available). In so doing the examiners **must** provide positive evidence that the thesis meets the assessment criteria for the award in question.

8.7 Outstanding Amendments

8.7.1 This recommendation is only available following minor/major amendments, where all of the required amendments have not been completed satisfactorily.

8.7.2 The examiners **must** be agreed that the candidate will be able to complete any amendments outstanding within 4 weeks of notification.

8.8 Fail (No degree be awarded)

8.8.1 This recommendation **should** be made where the thesis does not reach the standard required for the award of the degree in question, or the standard required for a lower award, where eligible.

8.9 Completing the report of the Board of Examiners

8.9.1 The Board of Examiners **must** complete a Board of Examiners' report form after every examination, whether following the initial submission or resubmission of a thesis, and whether or not there was a *viva voce*. The relevant Board of Examiners report form will be sent to the Board of Examiners along with the thesis once submitted. This report form **should** confirm whether the thesis is the work of the candidate and indicate how the thesis meets the assessment criteria for the award in question (see [section 7.2](#), Purpose of the Viva).

- 8.9.2 The Board of Examiners **must** confirm that they are satisfied that the thesis/dissertation complies with the [TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 13: Procedure for Graduate Research Students suspected of Research Misconduct](#) and the [University's Attribution Policy](#).
- 8.9.3 For all vivas conducted fully or partially through video-conference: The Board of Examiners **must** confirm that all present, including the student, agreed at the conclusion of the viva that holding the examination with the use of a video-link had no substantive bearing on the examination process. Where concerns are raised about the use of video-link having a substantive bearing on the viva, the lead internal examiner (or NEIC, where applicable) **must** contact the [Postgraduate Administration Team](#) in the first instance.
- 8.9.4 Where further work is recommended, whether minor or major amendments or a resubmission, the report form also provides a record of the additional work required.
- 8.9.5 Where amendments are required (whether minor, major or outstanding amendments or revisions prior to re-submission) the Board of Examiners report **must** indicate those aspects or parts of the thesis which they regard as unsatisfactory, and the nature and extent of the re-working required.
- 8.9.6 The Board of Examiners' report form **must** be suitably detailed and of sufficient quality to allow the candidate, with the support of their supervisory team, to have a clear understanding of the reworking required. The Board of Examiners **should** note that a member of the supervisory team **may** approach the lead internal examiner for clarification of the amendments required on one occasion only.
- 8.9.7 Where examiners wish to provide guidance to the student via annotations on the thesis, they **may** do so, but this **must** be in accordance with the following principles:
- The Board of Examiners' report form **must** always take primacy: including notes on the thesis itself is not a substitute for providing clear and explicit guidance on the report form (see below) and **should** only be used to provide supplementary notes.

- b. There is no obligation on the part of the examiners to annotate the thesis, and in particular, to proof-read the thesis. Where there are concerns about the standard of literary presentation, it is not necessary for the examiners to identify every failing of presentation in the thesis, e.g. every typo, beyond indicating the nature and type of remedial action required, which **may** include examples of errors that require amendment.
- c. The annotations **should** be clear, reasonable, and unambiguous, and written for the benefit of the student. They will not be reviewed as part of confirming approval of the Board of Examiners' report, and as such the examiners take sole responsibility for the nature of the annotations provided.
- d. Where annotations relate to the potential for future development of the candidate's thesis these **should** be distinguished from points related to amendments required to reach the standard for award.

8.9.8 The Board of Examiners' report form **should** state the format that the thesis **should** be submitted in, in the case of minor or major amendments or a resubmission.

8.9.9 Those amendments requested **must** be limited to those amendments necessary to satisfy the examiners that the thesis meets the assessment criteria detailed in the [Regulations](#) for the award in question.

8.9.10 The Board of Examiners' report form **must** form the basis of the examiners' subsequent decision as to whether the amendments required have been made satisfactorily.

8.10 Submission of the report of the Board of Examiners

8.10.1 The report form **must** be completed and signed by all examiners, and the NEIC (where appointed), it **should** then be counter-signed by the Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellor (or nominee) and then submitted to the [Postgraduate Administration Team](#) as soon as possible and no later than 15 working days after the viva has taken place.

- 8.10.2 Where no viva has been held, the report **should** be completed within 3 months of the receipt of the thesis by the examiners.
- 8.10.3 The Examiners **must not** provide a written report to the candidate or their supervisory team directly to notify them of their preliminary recommendations.
- 8.10.4 The Examiners **must not** directly contact the candidate with regard to their examination and **must** inform the [Postgraduate Administration Team](#) **should** the candidate attempt to contact them about their examination.
- 8.10.5 Examiners **should** note that under the Data Protection Act 2018 all candidates **may** request access in full to all reports including the preliminary report. Furthermore, if there is any dispute over the outcomes of the examination their reports **may** be viewed more widely, including by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

8.11 Approval of the Board of Examiners' Report

- 8.11.1 The [Postgraduate Administration Team](#) will ensure that the report is submitted to the Dean of Postgraduate Research for approval, with final approval of award by Senate.
- 8.11.2 In countersigning and approving the report the Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellor (or nominee) **must** confirm that they have read all preliminary reports, the comments in Part II, the report in Part III, and agree that the decision is in line with the examiners' comments and the outcomes as set out in this Code. They **must** also confirm that the report in Part III gives sufficient information and guidance to enable the candidate to undertake any amendments required.
- 8.11.3 Either the Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellor (or nominee) or the Dean of Postgraduate Research **may** refer back the report of the Board of Examiners, if they are not satisfied that the recommendation is in line with the examiners' comments and the outcomes as set out in this Code or if they are not satisfied that the report in Part III

gives sufficient information and guidance to enable the candidate to undertake any additional work required.

8.11.4 Under the exceptional circumstance that the appointed examiners are unable to reach agreement, the examiners **must** submit independent reports to the [Postgraduate Administration Team](#), who will arrange for the reports to be considered by the Dean of Postgraduate Research. The Dean of Postgraduate Research **must** then recommend to the Vice Chancellor, acting on behalf of Senate, the appointment of an additional external examiner. The additional examiner **should** be provided by the [Postgraduate Administration Team](#) with a copy of the thesis and the separate reports of the original examiners, and **should** be permitted to interview the candidate before submitting a final report and recommendation to the Dean of Postgraduate Research.

8.12 Notification to the candidate of the examination outcome

8.12.1 The [Postgraduate Administration Team](#) will send the Board of Examiners' report to the candidate, copying in the lead supervisor.

8.12.2 Where further work is required (amendments or a resubmission) the [Postgraduate Administration Team](#) will specify the deadline for submission of the thesis.

8.13 Explanation for candidates of the requirement to complete amendments/ resubmit their thesis

8.13.1 Candidates will receive written confirmation from the [Postgraduate Administration Team](#) of the outcome of the assessment of their thesis.

8.13.2 Candidates **should** carefully read the report sent to them by the [Postgraduate Administration Team](#) and where candidates are required to complete amendments to their thesis or to resubmit their thesis:

- a. Candidates **should** make any amendments required in the format specified in the examiners' report.

- b. Candidates **should** liaise with their supervisory team to discuss the additional work ensure that they understand the nature of the revision(s) required.
- c. Candidates **must not** contact any member of their Board of Examiners with regard to their examination. To do so will be treated as research misconduct under the [TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 13: Procedure for Graduate Research Students suspected of Research Misconduct](#).
- d. Candidates **must** submit their amended thesis to the [Postgraduate Administration Team](#) by the date specified in their letter or contact the office as soon as they can if there are any mitigating circumstances that will prevent them from submitting their thesis by the date specified. Failure to submit by the deadline specified will result in withdrawal from the University (see the [TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 5, Periods of registration and changes to registration status for Postgraduate Research students](#) (section 11)).

8.13.3 Where candidates are required to submit minor/major amendments or resubmit their thesis the [Postgraduate Administration Team](#) will inform them of the outcome of the assessment of their thesis (see [section 8.15](#) below for more information).

8.14 Examination of a resubmitted thesis

8.14.1 When assessing a resubmitted thesis, examiners should pay attention to:

- a. whether the candidate has successfully revised the thesis according to the examiner's recommendations for improvement in the initial Examination Report, and,
- b. whether the standards of the award have been met.

8.14.2 The procedures for the examination of a resubmitted thesis are essentially the same as for the initial submission of the thesis, with specifics detailed as applicable in the relevant sections of this handbook.

- 8.14.3 When completing the Examiners Report for the resubmitted thesis, examiners should be mindful that any further amendments required for award must be either
- related to improvements from the original Examiners Report that have not been satisfactorily completed, and/or
 - should be related to errors introduced as a result of the amended work. Wholly new amendments for areas of improvement not identified in the original report cannot be requested.

For example, if the original report does not require amendment to Chapter 2, Section 4, and this is unchanged in the resubmission, new amendments relating to this chapter cannot be introduced at this stage.

8.15 Assessing Amendments

- 8.15.1 The following text distinguishes between the date on which the candidate submits their amendments and the deadline date by which the examiner(s) are required to confirm the examination outcome.
- 8.15.2 The recommended outcome **should** be confirmed as soon as possible and no later than the following number of weeks after the candidate's submission of their amendments.

Recommended outcome	Minor	Major	Outstanding
The recommended outcome should be confirmed as soon as possible and no later than the following number of weeks after the candidate's submission of their amendments.	6 weeks	8 weeks	6 weeks
In exceptional cases, where the Lead Internal Examiner/Board of Examiners (as appropriate) are unavoidably unavailable at the point of submission of the revised thesis (for example due to annual leave or research leave without I.T. access), and unable to meet the deadline they must inform the Postgraduate Administration Team of this. In such instances the examiner(s) must confirm the outcome within the stated number of weeks after the candidate's deadline for submission of their amendments.	6 weeks	8 weeks	6 weeks

8.15.3 Where unforeseen circumstances cause delay the examiner in question **should** inform the [Postgraduate Administration Team](#) of this, who will inform the candidate of the delay.

8.16 Review of Amendments

8.16.1 Minor Amendments: The lead internal examiner **must** review the amendments and determine if they have been completed satisfactorily. (Exceptionally, the External Examiner **may** ask to review specific changes of a technical nature, required as a minor amendment to the thesis.)

8.16.2 Major Amendments: The Board of Examiners **must** review the amendments and determine if they have been completed satisfactorily.

8.16.3 Outstanding Amendments: The lead Internal Examiner or the Board of Examiners (as specified in their report) **must** review the amendments and determine if they have been completed satisfactorily. Where the lead internal examiner is not able to confirm that the amendments have been completed satisfactorily this **should** be referred back to the full Board for consideration.

8.16.4 [Section 8.16](#) lists the outcomes available to the Board of Examiners.

8.17 Available Outcomes after the completion of amendments

8.17.1 Satisfactory completion of the amendments **must** be reported to the Dean of Postgraduate Research.

8.17.2 Where a review indicates that the amendments have not been completed satisfactorily the Board of Examiners **should** recommend one of the following options to the Dean of Postgraduate Research:

Permitted Outcomes	Minor	Major	Outstanding
a. Amendments completed satisfactorily	Yes	Yes	Yes
b. That sufficient of the amendments have been completed to allow for the recommendation of the original award	Yes	Yes	Yes
c. That the outstanding amendments may be completed in less than four weeks	Yes	Yes	No
d. That an award lower than that registered for (e.g. MPhil) may be made	Yes	Yes	Yes
e. That no degree be awarded	Yes	Yes	Yes

9. Confidential Feedback

9.1 Principles of Feedback

9.1.1 Both external and internal examiners **may** provide the Dean of Postgraduate Research with confidential feedback about the examination process which will be considered in confidence.

9.1.2 Forms are sent directly to the examiners by the [Postgraduate Administration Team](#) and **may** be returned to the [Postgraduate Administration Team](#) in the first instance.

9.1.3 The Dean of Postgraduate Research **should** act on the issues raised in the report via an annual report to Board of Postgraduate Research. The identity of individuals **should** be kept confidential.