

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCE

University of Edinburgh

Guidance for Non-Examining Chairs¹

The appointment of independent non-examining chairs in vivas is recommended by the College of Humanities and Social Science as a method of ensuring fairness and consistency between different vivas and also in providing an additional viewpoint if the conduct of the viva should become the subject of a student appeal.²

The non-examining chair should not be involved in the assessment of the candidate's submission, nor in the appointment of the examiners. They also should have had no involvement with the candidate prior to the examination. Their primary role will be to advise the examiners on the University's research degree regulations, procedures and best practice with regard to oral examinations.

Non-examining chairs *must* be appointed where the internal examiner has had no previous experience of PhD/MPhil examinations (Assessment Regulation 1.8). However, it is *recommended* that Schools appoint a non-examining chair for every viva to ensure equity across the board. It is the responsibility of the Head of School to appoint an appropriately experienced non-examining chair.

1. Eligibility

The non-examining chair must be an experienced academic member of UoE staff: they should have been an experienced supervisor with knowledge of PhDs at all stages; have acted as an internal examiner on more than one occasion and; have knowledge of postgraduate matters.

2. Role and Duties

The normal expectation is that the non-examining chair will introduce and chair the oral. Where a non-examining chair has not been appointed the internal examiner should chair the oral³. As chair, the non-examining chair should introduce the examiners to the student, explain what will happen in the viva, interject if s/he feels any part of the viva is not correctly following procedures, ask the student as the viva ends if s/he understands what the results are and what s/he has now to do.

The non-examining chair should ensure that all parties to the examination process fully understand the expectations of them and should offer assistance and facilitation where necessary. The non-examining chair is not expected to express a substantive opinion on the merits of the thesis⁴.

The non-examining chair should confirm all practical arrangements with the internal examiner before the viva.

The primary role of the non-examining Chair is to ensure that:

¹ Approved at CHSS CPGSC 4 Nov 09

² QAA Code of Practice Section 1 PG research programmes Sept 2004, p24

³ Guidelines for Research Exams 4.4 <http://www.acaffairs.ed.ac.uk/Regulations/Assessment/08-09/ResearchDegreeExamGuide.htm>

⁴ Ibid 4.2

- a. s/he is familiar with the relevant University of Edinburgh regulations relating to the examination of research degrees;
- b. the examination process is rigorous, fair, reliable and consistent;
- c. the candidate has the opportunity to defend the thesis and respond to all questions posed by the examiners;
- d. questioning by the examiners is conducted fairly and professionally;
- e. the examiners adhere to the University's regulations and procedures, giving advice regarding the regulations to both the examiners and the candidate if required;
- f. the examiners' preliminary reports have been completed and received prior to the viva;
- g. the recommendations of the examiners are communicated clearly to the candidate and in a timely fashion.

3. Report

The non-examining chair may be asked to report back to the College Office on the following areas:

- i. Are you satisfied that the examination was conducted in accordance with the regulations and procedures of the University?
- ii. Were you called upon to provide advice to the examiners or candidate?
- iii. Did the examiners raise any matters in relation to the conduct of the examination?
- iv. Did the candidate raise any matters pertaining to the arrangement or conduct of the examination?