



Code of Practice for Doctoral Viva Voce Examinations

1	Composition of the Examination Board for Doctoral Degrees	2
2	Criteria for Appointment of the Board	2
2.1	Criteria for Appointment of Examiners (Internal and External)	2
2.2	Criteria for Appointment of External Examiners	3
2.3	Criteria for Appointment of Internal Examiners	4
2.4	Criteria for Appointment of Chair	4
3	The Roles of Board Members	4
3.1	Role of the Independent Chair	4
3.2	Roles of Examiners (Internal and External)	6
3.3	Role of the External Examiner	7
3.4	Role of the Internal Examiner	8
4	Role of the Supervisor, Department and Registrar/ Examinations Office	8
4.1	Role of the Supervisor(s)	8
4.2	Role of the Registrar and Examinations Office	9
4.3	Role of the Student's Department	9
5	The Viva Voce Examination	10
5.1	Aim of the Viva Voce Examination	10
5.2	Prior to the Examination	10
5.3	Venue	11
5.4	Format of the Viva Voce Examination	11
5.5	Duration of Examination	12
5.6	Attendance at the Viva Voce	12
6	Examiners' Report and Recommendations	12
7	Possible Outcomes of Viva Voce Examination	13
8	Guidance on Thesis Corrections or Amendments	14
9	Ratification of Examination Outcome	15
10	Deposit of Thesis in the University Library	16

1 Composition of the Examination Board for Doctoral Degrees

The examination board normally consists of two examiners, one of whom is internal and one external to the University. Examiners must be approved by the relevant faculty on the recommendation of the head of department and with the agreement with the supervisor. In the case of a thesis being presented by a full-time member of the academic staff of the University (with the exception of candidates who commenced the role towards the end of their registration or after submission of the thesis), the internal examiner is replaced by a second external examiner. Two external examiners may also be required in cases where there is no suitable internal examiner available or where a perceived or actual conflict of interest might apply. Where there are two external examiners, one of the external examiners, as indicated by the head of department, must take on responsibility for the duties normally fulfilled by the internal examiner.

In the case of a joint doctoral award, the composition of the examination board is detailed in the relevant memorandum of agreement (MOA).

The head of department should ensure, insofar as possible, that there is a balanced gender representation in the appointment of external and internal examiners. Where this is not feasible, the appointment of the chair should, where possible, reflect a balanced gender representation.

In all cases, the examination board is overseen by an independent chair, who is appointed by the Registrar.

Where the chair of the examination board is ultimately unable to participate in the viva voce examination, the Registrar may appoint an alternative chair. Where an examiner is unable to participate in the viva voce examination, or in the subsequent revisions process, it is open to the Registrar, in consultation with the head of the department and faculty dean, to appoint an alternative examiner.

2 Criteria for Appointment of the Board

2.1 Criteria for Appointment of Examiners (Internal and External)

Examiners should normally:

- Have experience in supervising doctoral students;

- Hold a formal academic qualification at doctoral level and/or a professional qualification or experience at an appropriate level for and relevant to the area being examined;
- Be willing to read the thesis and complete the examiners' reports within specified deadlines;
- Be available to attend the viva voce examination;
- Not have a close personal relationship with other examiners, supervisors or the candidate, if it might be construed by a reasonable person as entailing a conflict of interest.

2.2 Criteria for Appointment of External Examiners

External examiners should have recognised expertise in the subject matter of the thesis being examined. For research awards, external examiners are appointed for specific students, except in the case of some professional doctorate programmes where external examiners may be appointed to examine a cohort of students on a programme. External examiners for research students should not normally be appointed more than twice in a four-year period. Such appointments may be made irrespective of external examiners' duties with regard to taught programmes.

The external examiner should be independent of the university, of its internal examiners, supervisor(s), and of the candidate presenting the thesis for examination. Thus, all external examiners should:

1. Normally be a permanent member of academic staff of another university or equivalent institution;
2. Not have been an employee of the University in the five years prior to appointment (noting the exceptions in point 4 below);
3. Not have been a student of the University in the five years prior to appointment;
4. Not, in the past five years, have been a beneficiary of any bursary or remuneration from the University other than from roles such as external examiner, member of accreditation panel, member of quality review panel, member of recruitment/promotions panel or similar;
5. Not have assisted/advised the student on the work underpinning the preparation of the student's thesis.

In the case of nominees who are retired, relevant research activity should be evident within the previous four years.

2.3 *Criteria for Appointment of Internal Examiners*

The internal examiner should normally:

- Have sufficient knowledge (although not necessarily expert knowledge) of the general subject area to judge the quality of the thesis;
- Be a permanent member of the academic staff of the University with experience supervising research students;
- As far as practicable, be independent of the research, the student and the other examiner(s) and not be conflicted in any way in terms of the relationship to the supervisor or candidate.

If a head of department wishes to recommend internal or external examiners who do not satisfy the above criteria, this should be highlighted in the *Appointment of Examiners Form* and a case provided for consideration by Faculty.

2.4 *Criteria for Appointment of Chair*

The chair should normally:

- Be a permanent member of the academic staff of the University, at the grade of Associate Professor or above;
- Hold a doctoral level qualification;
- Not be a member of the department in which the student is registered.

3 The Roles of Board Members

3.1 *Role of the Independent Chair*

The role of the chair is to ensure that integrity and fairness is maintained by all parties during the viva voce examination. The chair is not required to have any knowledge of the subject of the thesis and is not required to read the thesis. Departments may stipulate that the chair must possess language or other skills considered necessary to carrying out the viva. The chair is

expected to be familiar with, and to be able to advise the board about, relevant Maynooth University regulations, including examination regulations.

Prior to the viva voce examination, the chair is responsible for:

- Ensuring that examiners are aware of any deadlines for submitting reports and other documentation;
- Ensuring that examiners and the candidate agree that the supervisor(s) may attend the examination and communicating this to the supervisor(s) (if relevant);
- Informing the supervisor(s) that they may neither examine nor question the candidate and may only provide clarification when requested by the board;
- In the event that an external examiner will attend remotely via MS Teams, ensuring that the candidate has agreed to this arrangement in writing;
- Consulting with the candidate about any accommodations they may need during the viva, including, for example, venue preferences, room layout, technology, lighting requirements;
- Where approval has been given for the viva examination to be held elsewhere or remotely, ensuring that the alternative examination setting is appropriate;
- Collecting and collating the individual written *Preliminary Examiner's Reports* from the examiners in advance of the initial meeting of the board (which is generally held immediately before the viva voce).

During the viva voce examination, the chair is responsible for:

- Chairing the preliminary meeting of the examiners and agreeing the format of the viva voce examination;
- Introducing all those present at the viva voce examination and attempting to put all parties at ease;
- Outlining the format of the viva voce for the examiners and candidate;
- Intervening in the examining process only if there appears to be bias, misconduct or unfairness, or if the examiners are diverting from the agreed format of the viva voce in such a manner as to disadvantage the candidate, or if the chair believes the viva voce is progressing in a manner which could compromise the University's academic standards. Actions which might be taken include calling a temporary halt to the meeting, holding a private discussion with the examiners and/or the candidate, or, most exceptionally, ending the viva voce examination;

- Chairing the post viva voce discussion of the examiners;
- Keeping a note on timing and progress of the viva voce examination that might be helpful in the case of an appeal.

After the viva voce examination, the chair is responsible for:

- Ensuring that the *Post Viva Form* is completed and presenting the report to the candidate at the end of the viva voce examination;
- Ensuring that the board outlines the nature and scale of corrections/amendments required and relevant timelines to the candidate;
- Where the examiners are in agreement, ensuring that the *Report on the Recommendation of the Examiners* (where relevant, indicating details of required corrections/modifications) is completed, signed and sent to the Examinations Office, normally within three weeks of the viva examination. In addition, the chair should ensure that all relevant documentation (*Preliminary Examiners Report* and relevant notes from the viva voce) is sent to the Examinations Office;
- Where the examiners are not in agreement, ensuring that the examiners' separate written reports are completed, signed and sent to the Examinations Office, normally within three weeks of the viva examination;
- Ensuring that a copy of the *Report on the Recommendation of the Examiners* (or the examiners' separate written reports where examiners were not in agreement) is sent to the head of the department, the supervisor(s) and the candidate and to the Examinations Office;
- Providing information in the case of a subsequent appeal.

3.2 Roles of Examiners (Internal and External)

It is the responsibility of the examiners to ensure that:

- The thesis is assessed by standards appropriate for the research degree;
- The candidate, in their viva voce examination, is assessed by standards appropriate for the research degree;
- The process of reading and examining the thesis, including the viva voce examination, is normally completed within a three month period;
- Clear guidance is provided regarding any required amendments or corrections;

- Review by the examiners of revised theses, where required, is carried out in a timely manner.

Where a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) is required for thesis examination, the examiners and the chair must complete the agreement as a condition of their appointment.

3.3 Role of the External Examiner

The external examiner plays a key role in the viva voce examination. The external examiner 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 relevant publications.

Prior to the viva voce, the external examiner(s) is required to complete an individual *Preliminary Examiner's Report* on the thesis and to provide the report to the Chair, normally one week prior to the viva. The template for the *Preliminary Examiner's Report* is sent to the examiners by the Examinations Office.

Where the examiners are in agreement, the external examiner should be available following the viva voce to complete the *Report on the Recommendation of the Examiners* (indicating corrections/amendments where required), normally within three weeks of the viva voce examination. Where examiners are not in agreement, the external examiner should complete and submit a separate report on the thesis.

In the case of major corrections that require approval by the external examiner, the external examiner shall coordinate with the internal examiner, who manages the post viva voce corrections process. In such cases, the external examiner must complete the *Confirmation of Corrections Form* and submit this to the Examinations Office to report that the corrections have been completed to the external examiner's satisfaction. In the case of resubmission of a thesis for examination, the external examiner should be available for the timely re-examination of the thesis.

3.4 Role of the Internal Examiner

The internal examiner is expected to play a full part in the discussion and in determining the outcome of the examination. Prior to the viva voce, the internal examiner is required to complete an individual *Preliminary Examiner's Report* on the thesis and provide the report to the Chair, normally a week prior to the viva. The template for the *Preliminary Examiner's Report* will be sent to the examiners by the Examinations Office.

Where examiners are in agreement, the internal examiner should be available following the viva voce to sign the *Report on the Recommendation of the Examiners* (indicating corrections/amendments where required), normally within three weeks of the viva voce examination. Where examiners are not in agreement, the internal examiner should complete and submit a separate report on the thesis.

The internal examiner normally manages the post viva voce corrections process. The internal examiner is responsible for coordinating the assessment of corrections and amendments with the candidate and, where applicable, the external examiner, and for ensuring that the candidate is fully informed of all required amendments/ corrections.

The internal examiner must complete the *Confirmation of Corrections Form* and submit it to the Examinations Office to report that the corrections have been completed to their satisfaction. In the case of resubmission for examination, the internal examiner should be available for the timely re-examination of the thesis.

4 Role of the Supervisor, Department and Registrar/ Examinations Office

4.1 Role of the Supervisor(s)

The supervisor(s) should provide the student with an opportunity to practise likely questions and test the use of any technology.

The supervisor(s) should normally be available for consultation with the examiners during the pre-viva meeting.

With the agreement of all examiners and the student, the supervisor(s) may attend the viva voce examination but shall not question the student and may only provide clarification when requested by the Board. The supervisor does not participate in the final decision and leaves the examination room while deliberations take place, unless asked to remain by the chair.

The supervisor(s) normally participates in the post-viva process, primarily to assist the student in addressing the corrections/modifications required by the examiner(s).

4.2 Role of the Registrar and Examinations Office

When the thesis has been submitted to the Examinations Office for examination, the Registrar appoints the chair and informs the relevant head of department.

The Examinations Office forwards the following to the chair and to each of the examiners:

	Chair	Internal and External Examiners
A password protected electronic copy of the thesis, along with a 300-word summary	✓	✓
A template for the <i>Preliminary Examiner's Report</i>		✓
A template for the <i>Report on the Recommendations of the Examiners</i>	✓	
The MU <i>Code of Practice for Doctoral Viva Voce Examinations</i>	✓	✓
The <i>Post Viva Form</i>	✓	
The password for the thesis.	✓	✓

After the viva voce, the Examinations Office forwards the completed *Report on the Recommendations of the Examiners* to Faculty (or, where relevant, to Academic Council or an Examination Board) for approval.

4.3 Role of the Student's Department

The Head of the department (or Head's nominee) in which the doctoral student is registered is responsible for:

- Nominating appropriately qualified and experienced examiners for approval by the relevant Faculty;

- Where relevant and with the student's written agreement, giving approval for the external examiner to join the examination remotely and informing the Examinations Office of this arrangement;
- Establishing a mutually convenient date, time and venue for examination and communicating the information to the chair, examiners and candidate;
- Ensuring that prospective external examiners are aware of the tasks that are typically required during the examination process and where prospective external examiners are based in institutions with different traditions and practices with regard to the examination of doctoral degrees that they receive appropriate information on regulations and practices at Maynooth University and on the external examiner's role.

5 The Viva Voce Examination

5.1 Aim of the Viva Voce Examination

The aim of the viva is to:

- Assess the quality of the thesis;
- Allow the candidate to defend the original contribution of the thesis;
- Provide an opportunity to expand upon and/or clarify the candidate's ideas;
- Establish that the research has been carried out by the candidate independently, as appropriate to the discipline;
- Determine the candidate's depth of knowledge and understanding of the field of study and of the literature;
- Examine the conceptual approach, research methods and techniques used in the thesis;
- Examine what was learnt and whether new knowledge was generated;
- Consider the candidate's ability to communicate their subject and to defend their research;
- Give advice on changes, future direction and possible publication;
- Determine whether the thesis is publishable in whole or in part.

5.2 Prior to the Examination

Prior to the viva voce, each examiner must separately complete an individual *Preliminary Examiner's Report* on the thesis. A pre-viva meeting of chair and examiners is held (often on the same day, prior to the time scheduled for the candidate and their supervisor(s) to attend) to review the *Preliminary Examiner's reports* and to agree the format of the examination. This

pre-viva meeting should allow sufficient time to (1) agree the format of the viva voce and (2) review the pre-reports. The supervisor(s) should normally be available for consultation with the examiners during this meeting.

The chair and examiners will agree the format and anticipated length of the examination.

5.3 *Venue*

The viva voce is normally held on campus. Care should be taken in choosing the venue for the viva voce to ensure that the examination can be conducted in an appropriate atmosphere, with low risk of interruption or extraneous noise.

External examiners may elect to attend online, with the candidate's written agreement and with the approval of the Head of Department. If the external examiner is joining the examination online, the venue should have reliable internet connectivity.

In exceptional circumstances (for example, the examination of candidates based overseas or where a health or personal circumstance precludes travel to campus), the examination may be held elsewhere or online, with the prior approval of the Director for Graduate Research, provided that the candidate, head of department and examinations board agree to the arrangement in writing. Guidelines for conducting a viva voce examination online are provided in Appendix A.

5.4 *Format of the Viva Voce Examination*

The Chair should provide the candidate with clear instructions regarding the timing and structure of the examination and should introduce the examination panel members. The candidate may be asked to introduce their research and summarise their main findings or to give a short presentation. Where a presentation will take place, the candidate should be provided with guidelines on content (e.g. a title) and duration at least one week in advance of the viva voce examination. A candidate may elect not to give a presentation. After the presentation, the examiners will ask detailed questions related to the thesis.

At the end of the viva voce, the candidate and the supervisor(s) will be asked to leave the room while the Board deliberates on the outcome. The candidate and supervisor(s) will normally be called back and informed by the chair of the outcome of the examination.

The *Post Viva Form* indicating the recommendation of the examiners and the nature and scale of corrections/amendments required is given to the candidate by the chair. The template for the *Post Viva Form* is sent to the chair prior to the examination by the Examinations Office.

5.5 Duration of Examination

There is no specified duration for a viva voce, as the objective of the exercise is the thorough examination of the thesis. The chair may offer the candidate and examiners a short (e.g., 10 minute) break at any point during the viva voce and it is advisable to do so when the viva voce exceeds 2.5 hours. The chair should ask the examiners during the pre-viva meeting to estimate the time required and this should be communicated to the candidate at the outset of the viva. The candidate may request a break at any stage during the examination.

5.6 Attendance at the Viva Voce

Normally, the only persons present during the viva voce examination will be the independent chair, the examiners, the candidate and, at the candidate's request and with the supervisor's agreement, the supervisor(s). In exceptional circumstances, at the candidate's request and with the approval of the Director of Graduate Research, others (e.g. a support person or advocate) may attend in a support/ observer capacity only.

6 Examiners' Report and Recommendations

The examiners should recommend awarding the degree where they judge the work to be worthy of publication, in full or in part, as a work of serious scholarship.

The *Report on Recommendation of the Examiners* should comment on:

- The quality of the research;
- The contribution the thesis makes to knowledge and scholarship;
- The written style and overall presentation of the thesis;

- The nature of corrections or amendments required (if any).

The report must be signed on each page by the examiners and by the chair. Signatures may be collected on a hard copy and scanned or produced by electronic means.

7 Possible Outcomes of Viva Voce Examination

The examiners may recommend one of the outcomes in the table below.

	Recommendation of Examiners	Registration and Fee Implications (if any)
1	Be awarded the doctorate degree without further examination or amendment.	No further registration or fee required.
2	Be awarded the doctorate degree without further examination, subject to making the changes specified which must be subsequently carried out to the satisfaction of the Internal Examiner.	No further registration or fee required.
3	Be awarded the doctorate degree without further examination subject to making specified changes to the satisfaction of both Internal and External Examiners. ¹	No further fee or registration required. Note: if revision will take more than six months to complete, candidates are required to re-register and a continuation fee will apply.
4	Not be awarded the doctorate degree but be permitted to re-submit the thesis in a revised form for re-examination by the same examiners. ²	The candidate should re-register for the duration of the period of revision. A continuation fee will apply.

¹ As a guide, this category is typically applied where examiners estimate that more than six weeks but less than six months additional work will be required to complete the revisions. However, the external examiner reserves the right to require sight of the corrections/ amendments irrespective of time required.

² As a guide, this category is typically applied where examiners estimate that there is more than six months additional work required to complete the thesis for re-examination.

5	Not be awarded the doctorate degree and not be permitted to submit for re-examination for the doctorate degree.	No further registration is permitted.
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Where revisions are required, in Category 2 and 3 above, these should normally be completed within six months.

Where the degree is not awarded but the candidate is permitted to re-submit the thesis in a revised form for re-examination by the same examiners (Category 4 above), the candidate must be registered in order for the revised thesis to be accepted for re-examination. Normally the revised thesis should be submitted within 12 months of the viva voce examination.

In the case of a PhD degree, where the examiners recommend that the doctorate not be awarded and that the candidate not be permitted to submit for re-examination, the examiners should consider whether or not the work is sufficient for an award at Master's level. If they agree that a Master's level award would be merited, then a separate recommendation to that effect may be made in writing to the relevant Faculty. This option should be seen as exceptional rather than as one of the usual possible outcomes of a doctoral examination.

8 Guidance on Thesis Corrections or Amendments

The examiners should ensure that details of any corrections or amendments that are required are set out clearly and provided in full to the candidate by the internal examiner and that they can be actioned by the candidate with guidance from their supervisor(s). Minor corrections such as typographical errors, formatting issues, clarifications, figure/table revisions, may be marked up on the thesis; where this is the examiners' preference it should be noted in the *Report on Recommendation of the Examiners* that a separate list of corrections exists. Major corrections such as structural revisions, theoretical and conceptual clarifications, methodological revisions, data analysis review, review of interpretations and literature review should be detailed in the examiners' report(s).

9 Ratification of Examination Outcome

Where examiners are in agreement as to the outcome, the *Report on the Recommendations of the Examiners* will be considered by Faculty (or Academic Council or Examination Board where relevant) when the following have been lodged with the Examinations Office:

- One hardbound copy of the thesis;
- An electronic copy of the thesis consisting of one PDF file mirroring the hard-bound copy;
- Where examiners have required corrections/ amendments to the thesis, the completion of changes have been confirmed in writing by the internal examiner, or internal and external examiner, as appropriate, using the *Post Viva Confirmation of Corrections by Examiners Form*.

In the case of a thesis submitted for a joint programme, the number of hardbound copies may vary. Requirements are set out in the relevant MOA.

Where the opinions of the examiners differ, each examiner should submit a separate written report for consideration by the relevant Faculty. The reports will be considered by Faculty without the requirement for submission of a hard-bound copy of the thesis. The Faculty may in such cases:

- Accept a majority recommendation (provided that the majority recommendation includes at least one external examiner);
- Accept the recommendation of the external examiner; or
- Require the appointment of an additional external examiner.

Following Faculty approval, the award is then ratified by Academic Council, the Conferring Office is notified and the candidate is invited to conferring. The doctoral degree is formally awarded on the conferring date, whether conferred in person or in absentia. The Conferring Office informs the National University of Ireland (NUI) of the award of degree.

While reports are normally sent to the next meeting of the relevant Faculty, or Academic Council, outside of term time reports may be approved by the relevant Examination Board in order to avoid unnecessary delay.

10 Deposit of Thesis in the University Library

The hard bound copy of the thesis along with an electronic copy of one PDF file mirroring the hard-bound thesis will be lodged in the University Library and in the institutional theses archive and made available to readers. All theses shall remain the property of the University. The author of a thesis is required to make a signed declaration at the time of submission of the thesis for examination to Maynooth University regarding the use the university may make of this thesis. The declaration will allow the university, at its discretion, to lend or, in accordance with the *Copyright and Related Rights Act 2000* and the *Maynooth University Open Access Policy*, copy from this thesis, upon request.

Should the candidate wish to withhold permission for the use of their work, the relevant *Thesis Withhold Request Form* should be completed and submitted to the Director of Graduate Research at the time of hard-bound submission. Such applications must have the written support of the author's supervisor. In the case of a joint PhD programme, the supervisor(s) at the partner institution(s) must also provide a statement of support of withholding. This application must state the reasons for the request for a stay on access and must provide a contact address.

The standard length of a stay is up to three years. For the duration of the stay, the author and title of the thesis will be visible in the institutional theses archive, with a note that the thesis is not yet available. Should the author wish to withhold access beyond that time frame, the author must make a further application to the Director of Graduate Research.

Once a thesis is made available in the institutional theses archive, it will remain available unless otherwise directed by the Vice-President for Research and Innovation. Further information is set out in the *Maynooth University Thesis Depositor Policy*.

Appendix A: Guidelines for Conducting a Viva Voce Examination Online

In exceptional circumstances (for example, the examination of candidates based overseas or where a health or personal circumstance precludes travel to campus), at the student's request and with the prior approval of the Director of Graduate Research, a viva voce examination may be conducted entirely remotely, with the student, chair and examiners joining the meeting online, usually from separate locations. In such circumstances, the following guidelines apply.

1. The request for an online examination should normally come from the candidate and should be made in writing to the chair of the viva panel. The examiners and head of the relevant department should be consulted in advance and should support the request.
2. The chair should request the approval of the Director of Graduate Research and inform the candidate, the examiners and the head of department where approval is granted.
3. The chair should keep a record of the candidate's written request for a remote viva and a record of the consent of all parties.
4. The chair should provide a copy of these guidelines to the candidate and the examiners.
5. The chair should seek to ensure that all necessary arrangements for conducting the viva are in place and that a platform recommended by Maynooth University IT Services is used.
6. Maynooth University has licences for the MS Teams product and recommends use of this software. If using MS Teams, it will be the responsibility of the chair to create a Teams meeting for the viva. If the student is to make a presentation, this may be facilitated through screen-sharing or distributing the presentation to members of the Examination Board through the chair.
7. Separate Teams meetings should be set up for the viva itself and any pre/post viva deliberations.
8. The technology should be tested in advance of the viva by all parties.
9. Where the thesis is subject to a non-disclosure agreement or there is a concern around intellectual property, a suitable VPN should be used. The VPN platform should be recommended by Maynooth University IT services.
10. The viva voce must not be recorded by any party present.
11. The camera should remain on throughout the viva voce and the candidate and examiners should be visible at all times. If the supervisor is present, their camera may be turned off unless they are called upon to clarify a matter.

12. If communication is broken during the viva and a connection cannot be re-established, the examination should be terminated and re-scheduled. However, where the Examination Board agrees that a truncated viva voce examination provides the basis for a positive recommendation, this recommendation may be made.
13. The *Report on the Recommendation of the Examiners* should include a statement that the viva voce was conducted remotely through MS Teams, with all parties in different physical locations.
14. When the *Report on the Recommendation of the Examiners* is completed, each member of the panel should sign an electronic copy and email it to the chair who will forward to research.theses@mu.ie.

The use of a virtual or hybrid viva voce examination cannot in and of itself be used as grounds for appeal of the result of the examination.

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the *Code of Practice for Viva Voce Examinations* and the *Regulations for Postgraduate Research Degrees*.