



MU Code of Practice for Viva Voce Examinations

Approved by Academic Council on 1 November 2021

Composition of the Board for the Viva Voce Examination

The examination board for the Viva Voce normally consists of an independent chair and two examiners, one of whom is internal and one external to the university. Examiners must be approved by the Faculty on the recommendation of the head of department and in agreement with the supervisor. In the case of a thesis presented by a full-time member of the academic staff of the university, two external examiners are appointed. Two external examiners also may be appointed in cases where no suitable internal examiner is available. When two external examiners are appointed, one of them (as determined by the head of department) shall assume the responsibilities of 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).

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

The Roles of Board Members

Role of the Independent Chair

The role of the independent chair is to ensure that integrity and fairness is maintained by all parties during the Viva Voce examination. The chair is not responsible for having any knowledge of the subject of the thesis and is not required to read the thesis. Certain departments may stipulate that the Independent Chair must possess language or other skills considered necessary to carrying out the Viva.

Prior to the Viva Voce Examination, the chair is responsible for:

- Ensuring the agreement of all examiners and the candidate that the supervisor may attend the examination and communicating this to the supervisor.
- In the event that an external examiner will attend remotely via Teams or another appropriate online platform (such as Zoom), confirming that the student has agreed to this arrangement.
- Ensuring that all other members of the panel attend in person. It is recommended that the chair contact external examiners who will attend the viva remotely at least 24 hours in advance to test connectivity.
- Informing the supervisor that they neither examine nor question the candidate and only provide clarification when requested by the Board.

- Collecting and collating the individual written pre-reports from the examiners in advance of the preliminary meeting of the Board (generally held just 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 candidates.
- 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.
- Chairing the post-Viva Voce discussion of the examiners.
- Ensuring the examiners complete and sign the relevant forms at the end of the Viva Voce.

After the Viva Voce Examination, the chair is responsible for:

- Ensuring that the Board completes the Viva Voce evaluation form and presents the form to the candidate at the end of the Viva Voce examination.
- Ensuring that the Report on the Recommendation of the Examiners (where necessary, indicating details of major/minor amendments required) is sent to the Registrar (examinations office) for approval by Faculty.
- Ensuring that a copy of the Report on the Recommendation of the Examiners is also sent to the head of department and supervisor.
- Providing information in the case of a subsequent appeal.
- Submitting all necessary documentation, (pre-reports and the Report of Recommendation of the Examiners and relevant notes from the Viva Voce), to the Registrar (examinations office).

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 his/her Viva Voce is assessed by standards appropriate for the research degree.

Role of the External Examiner

The external examiner plays a key role in the Viva Voce. 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) must separately complete an individual pre-report on the thesis and provide the report to the chair. The pre-report template will be sent to the examiners by the examinations office.

In the case of corrections or amendments that require sign off by the external examiner, the external examiner must coordinate with the internal examiner (who manages the post Viva Voce corrections process). In such cases, the external examiner must communicate with the examinations office to report that the corrections have been completed to their satisfaction.

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 must separately complete an individual pre-report on the thesis and provide the report to the chair. The pre-report template will be sent to the examiners by the examinations office.

The internal examiner manages the post Viva Voce corrections process. The internal examiner is responsible for working with the candidate and external examiner where applicable, to coordinate the assessment of corrections and amendments. The internal examiner must communicate with the exams office to report that the corrections have been completed to their satisfaction.

Recommendation for the award of the degree will not be made until all amendments have been made to the satisfaction of the internal examiner and, if required, the external examiner, and the examiner(s) have communicated with the exams office to report that the corrections have been completed to their satisfaction.

Role of the Supervisor

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

The supervisor(s) participate in the post-Viva process, primarily to assist the student in confirming the modifications required by the examiner(s). Good practice dictates that students engage directly with examiner(s) to ensure clarity regarding the required amendments.

The student is responsible for confirming with the examiner(s) the required amendments and for completing them to the satisfaction of the examiner(s).

Role of the Registrar (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 Registrar (examinations office) forwards to the chair and to each of the examiners a copy of the thesis with a copy of the 300-word summary, a pre-report template and a copy of MU Code of Practice for Viva Voce Examinations.

After the Viva Voce, the Registrar (examinations office) forwards the Report on the Recommendations of the examiners to Faculty for approval.

Role of the Candidate's Department

The HOD (or nominee) in the department of the doctoral candidate is responsible for:

- Establishing a mutually convenient date, time and venue for examination.
- Communicating information on the date, time, venue or online format (Teams, Zoom, etc) of the examination to the chair, all examiners, and the candidate.

Criteria for Appointment of the Board

Criteria for Appointment of Chair

The chair will normally be a permanent senior academic staff member of the University. The chair is not a member of the department in which the candidate is registered.

Criteria for Appointment of Examiners (Internal and External)

Examiners should normally have the following qualities and competencies:

- Experience in supervising doctoral candidates.
- 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.
- A willingness to respond to requests to read theses within specified time deadlines and to be available to attend.
- Examiners should 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.

External Examiners

For research awards, external examiners are appointed for specific candidates. External examiners for research candidates 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. No distinction should be made, for the purposes of appointing external examiners, between master's and doctoral degree candidates.

External examiners should have recognised expertise in the subject matter of the thesis being examined.

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

- Should normally be a permanent member of staff of another university or equivalent institution.
- Should not have been in the employ of the university (in any capacity) in the five years prior to appointment.
- Should not have been a student of the university in the five years prior to appointment.
- Should not, in the past five years, have been a beneficiary of any bursary or remuneration from the university other than from posts such as external examiner, member of accreditation panel, member of quality review panel, member of recruitment/promotions panel or similar.
- Should not have assisted/advised the candidate on the work underpinning the preparation of his/her thesis.
- In the case of nominees who are retired, relevant research activity within the previous four years will normally be expected.

Internal Examiners

The internal examiner should normally have the following qualities and competencies:

- Should have sufficient knowledge (although not necessarily expert knowledge) of the general subject area to judge the quality of the thesis.
- Should normally be a permanent member of the academic staff of the university with experience supervising research candidates.
- Must, as far as practicable, be independent of the research, the candidate and the other examiner(s) and not be conflicted in any way in terms of the relationship to the supervisor or candidate.

If departments wish to recommend internal or external examiners who do not satisfy the above criteria, this should be highlighted in the nomination form and a case provided for consideration by Faculty.

Format of the Viva Voce Examination

Venue

The Viva Voce should normally be held on campus. External examiners may elect to attend online, but the student must agree to this. In exceptional circumstances (for example, the examination of candidates based overseas) the examination may be held elsewhere, provided the candidate agrees to the arrangement and a request is submitted to the Dean of Graduate Studies for consideration.

Care should be taken in choosing the venue for the Viva Voce to ensure that the examination can be conducted in an accessible, relaxed atmosphere, with low risk of interruption or extraneous noise. If the external examiner is joining the examination online, the venue should have reliable internet connectivity.

Length

There is no specified length 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 comfort break of 10 minutes at any point during the Viva Voce and is advised to do so when the Viva Voce exceeds 2.5 hours.

Prior to the Examination

Prior to the Viva Voce, each examiner must separately complete an individual pre-report on the thesis. A preliminary meeting of chair and examiners is held (often on the same day, prior to the time scheduled for the candidate and their supervisor to attend) to review the pre-reports and to agree the format of the examination. This preliminary 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.

Format of the Viva Voce Examination

The candidate may be asked to introduce their research and summarise their main findings. 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.

Aim of the Viva Voce

The aim of the viva is to assess the quality of the thesis.

- To allow the candidate to defend the original contribution of the thesis.
- To expand upon and/or clarify the candidate's ideas.
- To establish that the research has been carried out by the candidate independently, as appropriate to the discipline.
- To determine the candidate's depth of knowledge and understanding of the field of study and of the literature.
- To examine the conceptual approach, research methods and techniques used in the thesis.
- To examine what was learnt and whether new knowledge was generated.
- To consider the candidate's ability to communicate his or her subject and to defend their research.
- To give advice on changes, future direction and possible publication.
- To determine whether the thesis is publishable in whole or in part.

Examiners' Report and Recommendations

The examiners should not recommend awarding the degree unless they judge the work to be worthy of publication, in full or in part, as a work of serious scholarship. Where examiners are in agreement, a joint Report on Recommendation of the Examiners is written. Where the examiners are not in agreement, separate Reports should be submitted. Both examiners must complete and sign the relevant forms at the end of the Viva Voce.

The Report on Recommendation of the Examiners should comment on:

- 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 required (if any).

Possible Outcomes of Viva Voce Examination

The examiners may recommend that the candidate should:

	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. Note: if revisions take more than six months, the candidate must re-register and a continuation fee will apply.
3	Be awarded the Doctorate degree without further examination subject to making specified changes to the satisfaction of both internal and external examiners.	No further fee or registration required. Note: if revisions take more than six months, the candidate must 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. In this case, the areas requiring major amendments will be detailed by the Examiners.	The candidate should re-register for the duration of the period of revision. A continuation fee will apply.
5	Not be awarded the Doctorate degree and not be permitted to submit for re-examination for the Doctorate Degree.	No further registration permitted.

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 following the Viva Voce.

In the case where the examiners recommend that the doctorate not be awarded and that the candidate not be permitted to submit for re-examination, the examiners may 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 may be made in writing to Faculty to that effect. This option should be seen as exceptional, rather than as one of the usual possible outcomes of a doctoral examination.

If the examiners recommend that the doctoral degree be awarded, the candidate must submit three hard bound copies of the thesis, as well as an electronic copy of one PDF file mirroring the hard-bound copy and embodying any changes prescribed by the examiners to the examinations office. The media formats currently accepted are: CD, DVD and USB memory stick.

In the case of a thesis submitted for a joint programme, the number of hardbound copies and CDs is determined in the Memorandum of Agreement applicable to the relevant joint doctoral programme.

The Report on the Recommendations of the Examiners will not be considered by Faculty until three hardbound copies and the electronic copy of the revised thesis incorporating the recommended changes and confirmed by the internal examiner (or internal and external examiner, as applicable) have been lodged with the examinations office.

Where the opinions of the examiners differ, each examiner should submit a separate written report for consideration by the appropriate Faculty. The reports will be considered by Faculty without the requirement for submission of hard-bound copies 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 and the Conferring Office is notified.

The conferring office informs the National University of Ireland (NUI) of the award of degree following the approval of the appropriate Maynooth University Faculty and Academic Council.