

# Guidelines for Doctoral Thesis Examiners

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## **The Doctoral Examination Process**

The examination at the University of Canterbury has two stages:

- 1) Two independent examiners each complete a report on the written thesis and make a recommendation regarding the award of the degree.
- 2) The candidate undergoes an oral examination with at least one of examiner present (full details of the oral examination are provided in the attached Information Sheet). Oral examinations of Doctoral candidates are standard practice at UC and only waived in exceptional circumstances.

The Dean of Postgraduate Research appoints two independent examiners, who are external to the University of Canterbury, after considering recommendations from the relevant Department/School. One of the examiners (often from New Zealand or east-coast Australia) is designated the oral examiner. This examiner provides a written report on the thesis and attends (either in person or via video-link) the oral examination. The other examiner provides a written report on the thesis but is not required to attend the oral examination. This examiner is asked to identify specific issues, or questions, for discussion in the oral examination. The chair of the oral examination will ensure that the issues raised by this examiner are considered in the oral examination.

Prior to the formal nomination of examiners, the candidate is informed of their names and has the right to make a case to the Dean of Postgraduate Research that one or both of them not be appointed.

A copy of the UC PhD Regulations and Guidelines is attached.

### ***Written examiners reports***

Examiners are each required to complete an Examiner's Report Form and also submit a separate written report. This written report should be relatively extensive and included comments on the strengths and weaknesses of the research and identify amendments (minor and major) necessary before the degree can be conferred. It should also list key questions that should be addressed in the oral examination. Reports should be sent electronically to the Postgraduate Office ([postgraduate-office@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:postgraduate-office@canterbury.ac.nz)) by the specified date. The reports will be released to the student and supervisors 5-10 days before the oral examination.

Examiners are asked to make a recommendation regarding the award of the degree as specified below:

- (a) the candidate be awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy subject to satisfactory completion of specified amendments and/or satisfactory performance in the oral examination

*Requested amendments may be minor (e.g., typographical/grammatical corrections) or more substantive. Amendments should be limited to changes necessary to ensure that the thesis meets the required standard for the award of the PhD. A list of required amendments will be determined at the end of the oral examination as well as designation of who will check that the amendments have been satisfactorily completed – this is usually the senior supervisor and/or oral examiner.*

- (b) the candidate be invited to revise and resubmit the thesis for re-examination prior to proceeding to an oral examination.

*Note that this option can be offered on only one occasion. It should be selected if the submitted thesis does not meet the standard required for the award of the PhD but it is thought that a revised thesis could meet that standard. The original examiners will be asked to also examine the revised thesis prior to proceeding to an oral examination.*

- (c) the candidate not be awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy but be offered instead an appropriate Master's degree

*This option should be selected if the submitted thesis does not meet the standard required for the award of the PhD but it is thought that it does meet the standard required for the award of a Master's degree.*

- (d) no degree be awarded to the candidate

*This option should be selected if the submitted thesis does not meet the standard required for the award of either the PhD or a Master's degree.*

On receiving the examiners' reports, the Dean of Postgraduate Research determines whether or not the candidate should proceed to an oral examination.

- If both examiners select recommendation (a) above the candidate will proceed to oral examination.
- If both examiners select recommendation (b), the candidate will be invited to revise and resubmit the thesis for re-examination prior to proceeding to an oral examination. After discussion with the candidate and supervisors, a timeframe for the submission of the revised thesis will be determined. The same examiners will be invited to examine the revised thesis, but alternatives may be appointed if either or both of the original examiners is/are unable to examine the revised thesis.
- If one examiner selects option (a) and one option (b), the chair of the oral examination will contact the examiners to broker a consensus as to whether the candidate should proceed to oral examination at this time or be invited to revise and resubmit the thesis for re-examination.
- If either examiner selects options (c) or (d) the Dean of Postgraduate Research will determine the final outcome

At the end of the oral examination the examiners make a recommendation to the Dean of Postgraduate Research, who then determines whether the degree is to be awarded and under what conditions (usually the completion of amendments specified by the examiners); full details can be found in the attached Information Sheet on the oral examination.

The Dean's decision is final, unless the candidate can demonstrate the examination process has been violated by procedural errors, bias or inappropriate practice. A student who believes that there has been a violation can make an informal academic appeal to the Dean of Postgraduate Research. A student who is not satisfied with the response from the Dean can formally appeal to the University Grievance Advisor.

### **Communication with examiners**

Examiners should address any questions regarding the thesis or the examination process to the Dean of Postgraduate Research via the Postgraduate Office: [postgraduate-office@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:postgraduate-office@canterbury.ac.nz). Examiners should not communicate directly with either the candidate or members of the supervisory team regarding the examination process until that process has been completed. The chair of the oral examination will contact the oral examiner (and, if necessary, the other examiner) to discuss details of the oral examination.

### **Confidentiality and embargoes**

All theses are considered to be confidential during the examination process. Unless there are special reasons, such as highly sensitive/confidential material in the thesis, the examiners are welcome to keep the thesis. After examination, application can be made to embargo a thesis for up to two years if it contains confidential and/or commercially sensitive material, or the candidate requires time to publish research reported in the thesis. Examiners should not distribute the thesis following the examination without prior permission from the candidate. More information on the University's policies on these matters in can be found in the University's Intellectual Property Guide

<http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/ucpolicy/index.aspx>