

## CODE OF PRACTICE ON POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH DEGREES: APPENDIX 3

### PROCEDURE FOR EXAMINATION OF A RESEARCH DEGREE THESIS

#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM) is committed to providing a high quality educational experience for all students, with appropriate academic support, administrative structures and good welfare services and facilities. This procedure is Appendix 3 of an inter-related framework of procedures under the *Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Degrees*.
- 1.2 This procedure covers the arrangements regarding the examination of a research degrees thesis. It seeks to ensure that students have a fair, timely and properly conducted examination carried out by appropriately qualified individuals as examiners.

#### 2. Scope

- 2.1 This procedure applies to all current PGR students registered with LSTM, whether based on-site, off-site or split-site, and studying full-time or part-time.
- 2.2 The procedure covers examination of a thesis leading to one of the following awards:
  - Master of Philosophy (MPhil)
  - Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
  - Doctor of Medicine (MD)

#### 3. General Principles

- 3.1 Following submission of the thesis, a *viva voce* examination will be held at which the student will be required to defend the subject of the thesis. The examination may be held remotely for off-site students based overseas in exceptional circumstances defined by the *Procedure for Remote Oral Examination of a Research Degree*.
- 3.2 There must be a minimum of two examiners to examine the thesis, one Internal Examiner and one External Examiner. A second External Examiner will be appointed where the student is a member of LSTM staff.
  - 3.2.1 The Internal Examiner will be a suitably qualified member of LSTM staff, or an honorary member of staff.
  - 3.2.2 The External Examiner will not be a member of LSTM staff, nor a former member of staff, unless a period of at least five years has elapsed since their contract of employment finished.
- 3.3 In certain circumstances, defined in Section 10.1, and in all re-submission *viva voce* examinations, an independent Chair of the examiners will be appointed and will normally be an academic member of LSTM staff at senior lecturer level or above.
- 3.4 It is expected that a second *viva voce* will be held in re-submission cases in order for the student to have the opportunity to defend their thesis, although this may exceptionally be waived at the discretion of the examiners. The *viva voce* shall not be waived if it is the initial view of the examiners that the re-submitted thesis has not reached the standard for the award of the degree sought.

- 3.5 The *viva voce* may not be recorded.
- 3.6 The supervisors may not attend the *viva voce*.

#### **4. Criteria for Selection of Examiners**

- 4.1 The essential criteria for the selection of an individual as an examiner of a research degree thesis are:
  - 4.1.1 Either, the person is a subject specialist and currently research active, as demonstrated by a publication record including both recently published work and work in progress, or have active involvement in on-going projects.
  - 4.1.2 Or, for appropriate research degrees and appropriate subjects, the person is an expert practitioner, demonstrated by ten years or more of professional experience in a relevant field that includes holding an appropriate senior position, and being involved in on-going research projects.
- 4.2 At least one of the examiners must have had previous experience of examining a research thesis.
- 4.3 Examiners should normally hold a qualification at doctoral level but may have their highest qualification at Master's level provided the Master's included a demonstrable piece of independent research. Qualifications must be awarded from a higher education institution with a strong research background.
- 4.4 Examiners must not have a relationship with the student through blood, marriage, civil partnership or common law, or a business relationship or a relationship relating to academic funding or sponsorship.
- 4.5 None of the proposed examiners should have had substantial direct involvement in the student's research project / thesis.

#### **5. Appointment of Examiners**

- 5.1 Formal responsibility for the appointment of examiners lies with the Director of Postgraduate Research (DPR).
- 5.2 The Primary Supervisor should provide the DPR with a summary of the candidate's thesis, indicating the field(s) of specialist study that are involved, and details of the proposed internal and external examiners, with details of how their expertise matches the content of the thesis.
- 5.3 Once the DPR has approved the appointment of the examiners, the Research Degrees Administrative Team will write to the examiners concerned, outlining conditions of appointment and their responsibilities.
- 5.4 Once formally appointed, the PGR Administrative Team will inform the student of the names of the examiners. Neither the student nor the supervisors should contact the examiners further to discuss any matter connected to the *viva voce* other than to confirm logistical arrangements.
- 5.5 The Internal Examiner will arrange a suitable date for the *viva voce* in consultation with the External Examiner and the student. This must normally be no later than three months after submission of the thesis.
- 5.6 The PGR Administrative Team will make logistical arrangements for the *viva voce* at the request of the Internal Examiner and will have responsibility for processing the examining fee and travel expenses.

## **6. Mitigating Circumstances / Disability**

- 6.1 The student should inform the DPR if there are any exceptional or medical circumstances that might affect their performance in the *viva voce* prior to the examination taking place. The DPR should seek consent to share this information with the examiners and inform the internal examiner.
- 6.2 Students who declare a disability to the Student Experience Officer may be entitled to reasonable adjustments. Adjustments recommended by the Student Experience Officer must be approved in advance by the DPR.

## **7. Duties and Responsibilities of All Examiners**

- 7.1 To notify the PGR Administrative Team immediately if they can no longer act as examiner and wish to withdraw from the appointment.
- 7.2 To ensure that the *viva voce* is conducted in accordance with this procedure.
- 7.3 To read the thesis and prepare an independent preliminary report in advance of the examination, identifying any concerns and giving an initial view. This must not be disclosed to or discussed with the student or the supervisors prior to the *viva voce*.
- 7.4 To meet with the other examiner(s) on the day of the *viva voce* in order to exchange the preliminary reports and agree an outline of how the examination will proceed (N.B. where an independent Chair is appointed, it will be their responsibility to agree with the examiners how the examination will proceed).
- 7.5 To participate in the *viva voce* and, with the other examiner(s), to agree an outcome, using knowledge and experience and external benchmarks to ensure that there is consistency of standards across LSTM.
- 7.6 To act in a manner that is fair and reasonable during the *viva voce*, giving the student every opportunity to explain and defend their work.
- 7.7 To give informal feedback to the student on the day of the *viva voce*.
- 7.8 To treat the thesis as privileged and confidential information.
- 7.9 To engage in appropriate professional development to support their examining work. Additionally, all appointed internal examiners must undertake appropriate training approved by LSTM.

## **8. Additional Duties and Responsibilities of Internal Examiners**

- 8.1 To arrange the date and location of the *viva voce*.
- 8.2 To ensure that the external examiner has prepared an independent preliminary report in advance of the *viva voce*.
- 8.3 Before the start of the *viva voce*, to confirm with the external examiner the possible outcomes permitted in accordance with the *Regulations for Postgraduate Research Degrees*.
- 8.4 To take action to suspend or adjourn the *viva voce* and undertake an investigation, should challenging circumstances, such as an allegation of academic misconduct, arise during the examination.
- 8.5 To ensure that an agreed final report is produced and signed by all examiners (except where there is disagreement) and to forward a copy of this to the PGR Administrative Team within ten working days.

- 8.6 To retain a hard copy of the thesis until the examination process has been completed.
- 8.7 To ensure that any minor modifications required to a thesis or recommendations for re-submission are sent directly to the student in writing, normally no later than ten working days after the *viva*. Students should be given detailed recommendations regarding re-submission.
- 8.8 Where the examiners do not agree on a recommendation, to prepare an independent final report, and to provide instructions to the external examiner(s) to do the same. The independent reports should be forwarded to the PGR Administrative Team.
- 8.9 Where a re-submission is required, to make themselves available to the student and Primary Supervisor soon after the first *viva voce* in order to clarify the recommendations made. However, the internal examiner must not be asked to review the revised work in progress before re-submission for examination.
- 8.10 To report any significant problems that occur in the *viva voce*, or any general issues arising from it, to the DPR.
- 8.11 Where minor modifications have been requested to the thesis, to ensure that the designated examiner(s) has seen and approved the modifications and signed a form to this effect, which must be forwarded to the PGR Administrative Team. The candidate is required to complete the modifications within three months from the date of the formal notification of the outcome of their *viva voce* and the modified thesis will be reviewed by the examiner(s) within ten working days of receipt.
- 8.12 Where a re-submission is required, which is permitted on one occasion only and must be made no later than one calendar year from the date of the formal notification of the outcome of their *viva voce*, to arrange a second *viva voce* unless all examiners agree exceptionally to waive this requirement. If the *viva* is waived, it is expected that the thesis will be reviewed by all examiners by no later than three months after the re-submission of the thesis and that the student will be notified of the examiners' decision no later than ten working days after the last day of the three-month period.

## **9. Additional Duties and Responsibilities of External Examiners**

- 9.1 To sign an agreed final report, and send it to the Internal Examiner (except where they fail to agree) in time for the internal examiner to comply with the requirements of Section 8.5.
- 9.2 To ensure that detailed feedback in respect of any minor modifications required to the thesis or re-submission is made available to the internal examiner in time for the internal examiner to comply with the requirements of Section 8.7.
- 9.3 To agree with the other examiner(s) who will be responsible for approving any minor modifications required to the thesis. Where this includes the external examiner, to ensure that the modified thesis is read and approved within ten working days of receipt by them of the modified thesis and the appropriate form signed and forwarded to the PGR Administrative Team.
- 9.4 To ensure that general issues about the *viva voce* are notified to the Internal Examiner. These may also be raised directly with the DPR.
- 9.5 Where the examiners cannot agree on a recommendation, to prepare an independent final report and forward this to the PGR Administrative Team.

## 10. Appointment, Duties and Responsibilities of the Independent Chair

- 10.1 An independent Chair should be appointed, to ensure that a candidate has full opportunity to defend their thesis, in the following circumstances:
- 10.1.1 Where re-submission of a thesis is required and a second *viva voce* is to be conducted, or following a research degree appeal when it has been determined that the thesis should be re-examined as a first attempt.
  - 10.1.2 Where the candidate is undertaking their research and being examined off-site.
  - 10.1.3 At the request of a candidate who is concerned that they could be disadvantaged by the examination arrangements. Such requests will be considered by the DPR.
- 10.2 It is the responsibility of the DPR to nominate an independent Chair. The Chair must be a member of LSTM academic staff but not normally of the same department in which the candidate is registered or the internal examiner is located.
- 10.3 The PGR Administrative Team will supply the Chair with an electronic copy of the following documents:
- The submitted thesis
  - The previous thesis, where appropriate
  - The corrections required by the examiners following the first *viva voce*, where appropriate
  - A template form for completion after the *viva voce*
- 10.4 It is the Chair's role to ensure due consideration of the welfare of the candidate during the *viva voce*. The Chair must not ask substantive questions of the candidate regarding defence of their thesis. It is not the responsibility of the Chair to exercise academic judgment in the *viva voce* (i.e. to participate in discussion of the thesis or the candidate or to act as academic arbiter between the Examiners).
- 10.5 The Chair has the following responsibilities:
- 10.5.1 To ensure that the *viva voce* is conducted in accordance with the PGR Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Degrees and Regulations for Postgraduate Research Degrees.
  - 10.5.2 On the day of the examination, to explain to the Examiners and candidate the role of the Chair and advise on the conduct of the *viva voce* and the possible outcomes
  - 10.5.3 To take action to suspend or adjourn the *viva voce* and undertake an investigation, should challenging circumstances, such as an allegation of academic misconduct, arise during the examination.
  - 10.5.4 To prepare an independent report on the conduct of the *viva voce* and submit it to the PGR Administrative Team within ten working days. This would include a report on any significant problems that occurred (e.g. significant disagreement between the examiners), or any general issues. In the event of significant disagreement between the examiners, the Chair may recommend appointment of a third (external) examiner. This report will not be provided to the candidate as part of the examination process.
  - 10.5.5 To treat the thesis as privileged and confidential information.

## 11. Outcome of the Examination

- 11.1 For PhD, MPhil and MD degrees the possible outcomes of the examination(s) are defined in the *Regulations for Postgraduate Research Degrees*.
- 11.2 A student is not permitted to request the opportunity of making a re-submission; it is wholly the decision of the examiners whether a student should be allowed to re-submit.

## 12. Entitlements and Responsibilities of Candidates in Relation to the Examination

- 12.1 Following submission of their thesis for examination, students are required to take responsibility for their preparation for the *viva voce*. Students should be aware that their supervisors play no part in the examination process.
- 12.2 The student will be examined on the material that has been submitted and the context within which the research has been conducted. The student may not submit further material after initial submission of the thesis.
- 12.3 Students should maintain a professional and courteous relationship with the examiners and should be prepared to receive critical feedback on their work. They are entitled to expect, however, that any feedback will be provided by their examiners in a constructive and supportive way.
- 12.4 Students should inform the DPR before the *viva voce* of any exceptional or medical circumstances that might affect their performance.
- 12.5 If a student wishes to make an appeal against the decision of the Examiners appointed to examine the thesis, they should consult the *Procedure for Appealing against the Outcome of a Research Degree Examination*.
- 12.6 If a student wishes to raise concerns about the conduct (but not the outcome) of the *viva voce*, they should raise the issue with the DPR in the first instance. If the matter is not resolved, the student should consult the *Student Complaints Procedure*.
- 12.7 If the student does not receive notification of required modifications within ten working days from the date of the *viva voce*, it is their responsibility to contact the Internal Examiner.