

Research Degrees Panel of Education Committee

Approved at the meeting of Research Degrees Panel on 9 June 2020

General Regulations Governing Research Degrees

Brief note about nature of change: changes to devolve various decisions relating to the conduct of research degree vivas/milestone assessments to the relevant board, removing the requirement for Proctorial permission.

Location of change

In *Examination Regulations 2019*,
<https://examregs.admin.ox.ac.uk/Regulation?code=grgoveresedegr>

Effective date

For all students from Michaelmas term 2020 onwards

Detail of change

Amend section §7, 3 (cit. ref. 1.125-1.148) as indicated, new text underlined, deleted text struck through.

3. Conduct of Oral Examinations for the Degrees of M.Litt., M.Sc. by Research, and D.Phil.

(i) The oral examination shall be held at Oxford in a suitable university or college building, unless in exceptional circumstances the board concerned ~~Præctors give~~ special permission for it to be held at some other place. Such permission shall only be granted where the candidate and both the examiners have agreed in writing to the proposed arrangements. In the case of Fine Art candidates offering studio practice as part of their submission, where it does not take place in the presence of the exhibition or portfolio of works, the candidate's supervisor must arrange for the examiners to view this part of the submission prior to the commencement of the oral examination. It shall, except in special circumstances, begin not earlier than 9 a.m. nor later than 5 p.m. and may be held in term or vacation. ~~The student or his or her college, other society, or approved institution, may within fourteen days of the date of the Præctors' decision in respect of the granting of consent, appeal in writing to the Chair of the Education Committee (who may nominate~~

~~another member of the committee, other than one of the Proctors, to adjudicate the appeal).~~

(ii) The examination may be attended by any member of the University in academic dress. No person who is not a member of the University may attend it except with the consent of both examiners.

The relevant board may decide (either at its own discretion or at the request of the candidate or the supervisor or department) to forbid the attendance of any person or all persons (other than the examiners and the candidate) or to impose any condition on attendance if and to the extent that such action is in their view necessary to protect the interests of the University or the candidate or both, and the examiners shall be informed accordingly and shall include this information in the notice of examination.

(iii) The place and time of the examination shall be fixed by the examiners, who shall be responsible for informing the candidate of the arrangements made. It shall be the duty of candidates to ensure that any letter addressed to them at their college or any other address which they have given is forwarded to them if necessary. The examiners shall allow reasonable time for receiving an acknowledgement from the candidate of their summons.

(iv) Except as provided in clause (v) below, the day shall be fixed by the examiners to suit their convenience. So that candidates may know what arrangements for absence from Oxford they may safely make, the examiners shall inform candidates within a reasonable time of the date fixed.

(v) Candidates may apply to the board concerned for the oral examination to be held not later than a certain date, provided that this date shall not be earlier than four weeks after the date on which the thesis was uploaded to the RTDS or after the date on which the examiners have formally agreed to act, whichever is the later. If the board is satisfied that there are special circumstances justifying this application, it will ask the examiners to make arrangements to enable the oral examination to be held within the period specified. In such cases the examiners, when invited to act, will be informed that the candidate has asked that the oral examination should be held not later than a certain date, and acceptance of the invitation to examine will be on the understanding that they would seek to meet this request. If it is not practicable to meet the student's request, then the board shall decide how to proceed.

If, for any reason, examiners wish to hold a viva within four weeks of receiving their copy of the thesis, a request notification should be sent to the relevant board, which shall decide whether to grant it. The reasons for the request should be provided, along with an assurance that both examiners will have sufficient time to consider the thesis before the viva. The request shall only be granted where the candidate and both the examiners have agreed in writing to the proposed date of the viva. Requests for vivas to be held fewer than 14 days after receipt of the thesis by the examiners should only be granted in the most exceptional circumstances. ~~and the permission of the Proctors must be sought. This may be done by contacting the Proctors' Office giving details of the proposed~~

~~arrangement and the reasons for the request. Under no circumstances will a viva be permitted to take place within 14 days of receipt of the thesis by the examiners.~~

(vi) Notice of the examination shall be given in one of the following ways:

1. It may be published in the University Gazette not later than the day before it is due to take place;

2. Not later than two days before the examination the examiners may:

(a) inform the Graduate Studies Office in writing; and

(b) post a notice in the Examination Schools; and

(c) if the examination is to be held at a place other than the Examination Schools, post a notice also at the place of the examination.

The notice shall state the name of the candidate, the subject of the thesis, the place, day, and hour of the examination, and the names of the examiners.

~~If an examination is held without the giving of the notice required by this regulation it shall be invalid, unless the Proctors, on receipt of a written application from the examiners, shall determine otherwise. The student or his or her college, other society, or approved institution, may within fourteen days of the date of the Proctors' decision in respect of the granting of consent, appeal in writing to the Chair of the Education Committee (who may nominate another member of the committee, other than one of the Proctors, to adjudicate the appeal).~~

(vii) If, owing to illness or other urgent and unforeseen cause, an examiner is unable to attend the examination, it shall be postponed to a later date, provided that, if the Proctors are satisfied that postponement would be a serious hardship to the candidate, they may authorize another member of the board concerned to attend the examination as a substitute, but such substitute shall not be required to sign the report. The Proctors shall determine what payment, if any, the substitute examiner shall receive.

(viii) Candidates are strongly recommended to take a copy of their thesis to the examination. In the case of Fine Art candidates offering studio practice as part of their submission, where the oral examination is not taking place in the presence of the exhibition or portfolio of works, it is recommended they attend with the written portion of their thesis together with documentation of the work.

(ix) An oral examination shall normally be held in Oxford as prescribed in clause (i). In exceptional circumstances, ~~normally affecting the ability of the external examiner to take part in an Oxford-based oral examination,~~ application may be made to the relevant board for special permission to hold the examination using audiovisual electronic communication ~~with the external examiner concerned.~~ Such circumstances will normally relate to the ability of the external examiner to take part in an Oxford-based oral

examination, but in exceptional circumstances, special permission may be granted for any or all of the candidate and examiners to take part in the examination using audiovisual electronic communication. The board concerned may approve the application only where:

(i) it accepts that no alternative and timely arrangements may reasonably be put in place;

(ii) the proposed arrangements are acceptable to both examiners and to the candidate, all of whom have agreed to them in writing;

~~(iii) it involves remote communication with only one of the examiners (normally the external);~~

~~(iii iv)~~ it is content to bear the additional cost of the necessary arrangements;

~~(iv) an oral examination of this type takes place according to arrangements and in premises approved by the Proctors;~~

~~(iv vi)~~ the oral examination takes place according to the protocol approved by the Education Committee;

(vii) in the event of any technical or other problems, the validity of the process used to conduct the oral examination and to determine the outcome will be decided by the Proctors.

Explanatory Notes

At its meeting in Hilary term 2020, Research Degrees Panel of Education Committee agreed that a number of decisions relating to the conduct of research degree vivas/milestone assessments should no longer require Proctorial permission, and that decisions should be devolved to the relevant board. At its meeting in Trinity term 2020, the Panel approved changes to regulations to implement its decision.