

Examination of Doctoral Degrees by Viva Process

1. Overview

1.1. This process supports the Graduate Research Training Policy (MPF1321) by stating detailed requirements for the examination of doctoral degrees by viva at the University of Melbourne.

2. Purpose

2.1. The purpose of the viva is to:

- a) provide an opportunity for the candidate to present their research while enabling examiners to clarify concerns with the thesis
- b) provide an opportunity for the candidate to discuss their research in detail with examiners who are leaders in their field
- c) assure examiners that the research presented is the candidate's own and to clarify the candidate's contribution to any collaborative research
- d) facilitate the examiners reaching an agreement on an examination outcome, and
- e) enable communication of the examination outcome to the candidate on the day, including where relevant an indication of required revisions to the thesis.

3. Process

Appointment of the viva chair

3.1. The viva chair is appointed by the chair of examiners to oversee the viva.

3.2. The viva chair must:

- a) be a senior academic member of staff in the candidate's department
- b) meet the requirements to be an advisory committee chair, as set out in *Schedule 4: Advisory Committees* of the Graduate Research Training Policy, and
- c) not be a supervisor or member of the advisory committee of the candidate under examination.

Communication and arrangements

3.3. The viva chair is responsible for arranging the viva.

3.4. The attendees at the viva are the viva chair and the examiners. The candidate's supervisors must not attend the viva examination.

3.5. The local graduate research manager is responsible for sending formal invitations, finalising times and organising room venues/equipment, sending notifications and providing other administrative support.

3.6. The graduate research manager must take all reasonable steps to ensure that the viva is scheduled at a reasonable time for all participants. The viva must be scheduled to be conducted between 8:00am-9:00pm in the candidate's local time zone.

3.7. The viva is conducted via videoconference unless all participants are in Melbourne during the scheduled viva.

3.8. The viva is recorded via videoconference. The recording is kept confidential, and only made available in specific circumstances. The recording will not capture the discussions between examiners before and after the viva during which the questions and outcome are deliberated.

3.9. If an examiner is unable to attend the viva at short notice (and rescheduling is impractical), the attending examiner can present questions from the absent examiner by proxy.

3.10. Where a participant has a disability or in special circumstances requests particular support in accordance with an academic adjustment plan, the viva chair in consultation with the chair of examiners will make alternative arrangements for the viva, including the attendance of a person providing disability support (e.g. a sign language interpreter).

Before the viva

3.11. Each examiner must independently examine the thesis against the criteria in <Schedule 1 of the Graduate Research Training Policy> and make a preliminary report in writing three weeks prior to the viva. The preliminary reports do not include a provisional result.

3.12. The graduate research examinations team must provide the chair of examiners, viva chair and the examiners with copies of the examiners' preliminary reports two weeks prior to the viva. Neither the supervisors nor the candidate receive a copy of the examiners' preliminary reports prior to the viva.

3.13. Any concerns regarding the appropriateness of the preliminary report may be referred by the chair of examiners to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (PVC) for graduate research. In exceptional circumstances, the PVC for graduate research may authorise the redaction of sections of the reports.

Conduct of the viva

3.14. A pre-meeting (30 mins) is held prior to the commencement of the viva between the viva chair and examiners to discuss conduct and order of questions.

3.15. Upon commencement of the viva, the candidate will present a brief verbal overview of the thesis (5-10 minutes), after which the two examiners will question and conduct a discussion with the candidate.

3.16. The discussion is moderated by the viva chair. The panel can use a minimum of one hour and a maximum of two hours and the chair should seek to ensure that both examiners get a suitable opportunity to present questions.

3.17. At the conclusion of the viva, the candidate is briefly excused while the examiners confer about the outcome of the viva.

Determining the outcome of the viva

3.18. The examiners are expected to agree on a joint examination outcome through post-viva deliberation.

a) Where the examiners agree on examination outcome of pass or fail (<Schedule 1 of the Graduate Research Training Policy>) the examiners will conclude the post-viva deliberation and advise the candidate in accordance with cl 3.19.

b) Where an outcome of Minor Revision is agreed, one examiner is nominated to assess the revised thesis. Examiners must also agree and note the scope of any revisions.

c) Where an outcome of Major Revision is agreed on, one examiner is nominated to assess the revised thesis. Examiners must also agree and note the scope of any revisions.

d) If examiners cannot reach consensus during post-viva deliberation, the viva chair informs the chair of examiners, who refers the matter to the PVC for graduate research for adjudication in accordance with cll 5.013 to 5.107 of the Graduate Research Training Policy. The viva chair verbally informs the candidate of this process.

3.19. At the conclusion of the deliberation, the candidate will be invited back to the viva and:

- a) advised of the outcome of the examination; and
- b) provided with a verbal indication of any revisions required, and the timeline for completing them:
 - i. Pass (minimal type/format errors): 6 weeks
 - ii. Pass with Minor Revision: 2 months
 - iii. Major Revision: 12 months

3.20. Following the viva, the examiners will meet to draft a brief final report in which the examination outcome and details of any required revisions are clearly outlined. The final report must be submitted to the viva chair. In exceptional circumstances, the final report may be finalised no later than five business days after the viva.

3.21. The chair of examiners must review the examiners' preliminary and final reports prior to approving them for release to the candidate and principal supervisor, to ensure they are appropriate. The PVC for graduate research may approve the redaction of any content considered inappropriate. Approval for release should occur as soon as reasonably practical, and normally within 5 business days of receipt.