

ACADEMIC REGISTRY



HANDBOOK ON EXAMINING FOR RESEARCH DEGREES

PGR Thesis Submission information: <http://www.hw.ac.uk/students/studies/examinations/thesis.htm>
PGR Thesis Examination information: <http://www1.hw.ac.uk/registry/examinations/thesisexamination.htm>

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1 **Preamble**

- 1.1 The appointment of External and Internal Examiners is a fundamental factor in maintaining standards in research and the procedure for appointment ensure that such standards are upheld. External Examiners for Higher research degrees are appointed by the Postgraduate Studies Committee on behalf of the Senate and such appointments are reported to the Senate for information.
- 1.2 The following Heriot-Watt University Regulations set out the requirements for the appointment of External Examiners for the Higher research degrees currently offered by the University, details of which have been summarised in the following sections of this document:
- *Regulation 6: Degree of Doctor of Philosophy,*
 - *Regulation 37: Degree of Doctor of Engineering (EngD),*
 - *Regulation 41: Degree of Doctor of Business Administration,*
 - *Regulation 43: Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (by Published Research), and,*
 - *Regulation 49: Higher Degree of Masters (Research)*

2 **Appointment of Examiners**

- 2.1 For each candidate undertaking research they must be examined by at least two Examiners, of whom at least one must be an External Examiner. *In the event of an Internal Examiner also acting as Supervisor of the candidate or if the candidate is a member of staff of the University then at least two External Examiners should be appointed.*
- 2.2 The recommendation for the appointment of External Examiner(s) for the degree should be initiated by the Supervisor(s) of the candidate and endorsed by the Director of Research in the organising School/Institute.
- 2.3 Nominations for the appointment of Examiners and approval of thesis titles for research degrees should be made on the appropriate template which is available at:
<http://www.hw.ac.uk/students/doc/externalexaminers-appointmentpgr.pdf>.
- External Examiners should normally be senior members of the research/scholarly community. Nominated External Examiners should either provide a copy of their own CV or complete the Heriot-Watt standard CV template which can be downloaded at <http://www.hw.ac.uk/registry/resources/CVtemplate.doc>.
- This CV template should accompany the nomination form so that evidence that the proposed Examiner is competent to examine at this level is available. The CV should demonstrate that the Examiner is competent to judge the standard of the work presented, can judge its technical quality and can assess the research methods adopted. The Examiner will also be required to compare the University's degree with other degrees and give recommendations to students on the pass/fail boundary.
- 2.4 An Examiner should not normally be proposed if that Examiner (or a colleague from the same institution and subject area as the proposed Examiner) has been appointed within the last two years in the same subject area in the University as the proposed candidate. Similarly, the Examiner should not normally be proposed if a member of Heriot-Watt University's staff in the same subject area as the candidate has been appointed within the last two years in the same institution and subject area as that of the proposed Examiner.
- 2.5 An Examiner should not hold any position within an industrial sponsor or other organisation that has an, involvement, whether direct or indirect, with the student's research. This requirement is in place to prevent potential conflicts of interest.
- 2.6 All Examiners should normally hold a PhD and have been engaged in appropriate research or equivalent scholarly activity for a number of years. In some circumstances proposed Examiners who are able to provide evidence of equivalent experience and suitable technical competence in a relevant subject area may be appointed.

A variety of evidence could be provided in order to demonstrate that an Examiner has the experience to judge the standard of a PhD (or EngD). Examples include having examined other candidates either as Internal or External Examiner, having supervised PhD candidates to successful completion or having been involved in other forms of assessment that can be related to or compared with a UK PhD. Where appropriate, the School Director of Research should attach a short statement on why the proposal for the examiner is being made.

- 2.7 The criteria for an Examiner for a degree of Master of Philosophy (MPhil) should be the same as that for a PhD or EngD except that the Examiner should as a minimum hold an MPhil and have supervised MPhil students.
- 2.8 The form should be submitted to the Academic Registry at least four weeks prior to the date of submission to allow time for the proposal to be approved by the Postgraduate Studies Committee and for the relevant correspondence to be sent to the Examiners.
- 2.9 On approval, the External Examiner will receive a formal letter of appointment which indicates the name of the candidate, school, degree, Internal Examiner(s) and Supervisor. A copy of the letter is sent as appropriate to the Internal Examiner and Supervisor for information.
- 2.10 In certain instances the Chair of the Postgraduate Studies Committee (or the Clerk on his or her behalf) may contact a Supervisor directly to obtain additional information on a nominated Examiner prior to the appointment being approved.

3 Preparation of Examiners' Individual Reports in Advance of Examination

- 3.1 The Academic Registry will ensure that each Examiner is sent a copy of the thesis, together with information on how to access the appropriate Regulations, guidelines and report forms using the Academic Registry website: <http://www1.hw.ac.uk/registry/examinations/thesisexamination.htm> or by contacting the Academic Registry directly on +44 (0) 131 451 3727 or emailing registry@hw.ac.uk.
- 3.2 Each Examiner, having read the thesis, should prepare an individual typewritten report in advance of an oral examination. The report should cover all relevant issues arising from the candidate's thesis that the examiner wishes to highlight. Each report should be prepared on the Individual Examiner's Report Form template available at <http://www.hw.ac.uk/registry/resources/examinersreports.doc>. The Examiners should discuss their individual reports before the start of the examination.
- 3.3 Where no oral examination is scheduled to take place, which is normally the case for MPhil degrees, the same sequence of events as set out above should still be followed, with the Joint Examiner Report Form (see below for further details) being posted to the External Examiner for signature.

4 Expected Standards for Postgraduate Research courses of study

- 4.1 The standard of the **Degree of Master of Philosophy (MPhil)** shall be that expected of a good Honours graduate who has satisfactorily completed a research course and has investigated and evaluated or critically studied an appropriate topic over not less than 18 months of full-time study, or equivalent, and has presented a satisfactory thesis. In addition, a candidate for the award of MPhil must be able to demonstrate a full and proper understanding of the research methods appropriate to the field of study concerned.
- 4.2 The standard of the **Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (or equivalent)** shall be that expected of a good Honours graduate who has satisfactorily completed a research course and has investigated and evaluated or critically studied an appropriate topic over not less than 24 months of full-time study, or equivalent, resulting in a significant original contribution to knowledge, and has presented a satisfactory thesis. In addition, a candidate for the award of PhD must be able to demonstrate a full and proper understanding of the research methods appropriate to the field of study concerned.

5 Oral Examination (Viva Voce)

- 5.1 The Internal Examiner is responsible for making all necessary arrangements for oral examinations. The Internal Examiner is responsible for ensuring that the External Examiner is properly consulted on these arrangements.
- 5.2 An oral examination is normally expected and required for a PhD candidate. In exceptional cases, the examiners may consider that an oral examination is unnecessary, in which case an application to forego an oral examination must be submitted in writing to the Postgraduate Studies Committee for approval, stating clear reasons for disposing of the oral examination.
- 5.3 A candidate for the degree of MPhil is required to undergo an oral examination only if the Examiners so decide.
- 5.4 Further details on the operation and regulation of oral examinations are available in the Guidelines for Research Oral Examinations which can be found at:
<http://www1.hw.ac.uk/registry/examinations/thesisexamination.htm>

6 Recommendations of the Examiners

- 6.1 Immediately following the oral examination the Examiners should seek, if possible, to arrive at an agreed recommendation.
- 6.2 The Internal Examiner must ensure that the candidate is formally notified in writing of the examiners' recommendations as soon as possible and certainly no later one month following the date of the oral examination. This notification must include all details of required revisions, amendments and necessary resubmissions, indicating the scale and scope of the changes required.
- 6.3 The Examiners should use the University's Joint Examiners Recommendation form available at <http://www1.hw.ac.uk/registry/resources/examinersjointreport.doc> to record one of the following recommendations:
- (a) That the candidate be awarded the degree;
 - (b) That the candidate be awarded the degree, subject to the specified minor (typographical) corrections being completed to the satisfaction of the Internal Examiner. A further report demonstrating that the particular changes were satisfactory, must be submitted to the Academic Registry by the Internal Examiner;
 - (c) That the candidate be awarded the degree, subject to corrections being completed to the satisfaction of the Internal Examiner (submission within 6 months). A further report demonstrating that the particular changes were satisfactory, must be submitted to the Academic Registry by the Internal Examiner;
 - (d) That the candidate re-submit without the need for further oral examination, specifying the areas requiring attention and suggested time limit (submission within 24 months required for a PhD and 12 months for an MPhil);
 - (e) That the candidate re-submit the thesis after further work for further oral examination;
 - (f) That no award be made.
- 6.4 Exceptionally, in the case of a PhD submission, any of the above recommendations may be made alongside the recommendation to award the candidate with the degree of MPhil instead of PhD. The Examiners' Joint Recommendation Form must contain a clear rationale for arriving at this recommendation.

6.5 In cases where a re-submitted thesis is being considered, only options (a), (b) and (f) may be put forward as valid recommendations and may not normally recommend a further resubmission, under the terms of paragraph 11.4 of Regulation 6, 14.4 of Regulation 37, 10.4 of Regulation 41, 10.4 of Regulation 43 and 11.4 of Regulation 49.

6.6 The MacFarlane Prize commemorates the contribution to the University made by Professor A G J MacFarlane during his tenure as Principal and Vice Chancellor. The Award is made annually to a PhD graduate who has clearly produced a performance of outstanding quality during the period of research. This may be demonstrated by some or all of the following: work of significance in the field of study; a distinguished contribution to knowledge; a thesis of high quality and/or a body of published work. If the Examiners consider the candidate to be appropriate for the award, this should be stated on the Examiners' Joint Recommendation Form.

7 Submission of Examiners' Report Forms

7.1 The completed Individual Examiners' reports and Joint Examiners' Recommendation form must together provide sufficiently detailed comments on the scope and quality of the work to enable the University to satisfy itself that the criteria for the award of the degree have been met.

7.2 All of this documentation should be submitted to the Academic Registry as soon as possible and, in any event, no later than three months from the date of receipt of the thesis. In the event of the Examiners failing to reach a consensus, this should be stated on the Examiners' Joint Recommendation Form along with an indication of the area of disagreement. Where no oral examination is required, the Examiners should still complete the Examiners' Joint Recommendation Form.

7.3 In all cases, the Internal Examiner must also submit a declaration with the final presentation copies of the thesis, stating that any required corrections have been carried out to the satisfaction of the Examiners, and that the thesis is bound in accordance with the regulations of the University.

7.4 The Postgraduate Studies Committee will consider the reports and recommendations from the Examiners and, on the basis that the requisite criteria are satisfied, will recommend that the degree be awarded.

8 Re-Examination

8.1 In any case where re-examination is recommended, the Internal Examiner should submit to the Chair of the Postgraduate Studies Committee (via the Academic Registry) a written report specifying the deficiencies that need to be remedied. Both Examiners should complete the Individual Examiners' Report Forms in the normal way and should indicate on the Examiners' Joint Recommendation Form why they believe that re-submission has the ability to lead to a successful conclusion.

8.2 After taking any action deemed necessary, the Chair (acting on behalf of the Committee) will approve the recommendation and request that the candidate be informed of the terms of the re-submission. The relevant Head of School/Director of Research will also be requested to indicate the procedures for, and personnel concerned with, supervision during this period. A record of all interactions with the candidate during this time (e.g. letters, meetings, etc.) should be retained in the student's official file held in the appropriate School/Institute.

8.3 At the appropriate time each Examiner will be provided with a copy of the revised thesis. Having read the thesis, the examiners should prepare new individual typewritten reports on the Individual Examiner's Report Form and complete a further Examiners' Joint Recommendation Form at the appropriate time.

9 Confidentiality of Reports

9.1 Examiners' Reports are confidential to the Postgraduate Studies Committee and shall not normally be disclosed to the candidate¹ or Supervisor. However, in the event of an appeal (under Regulation 36), and notwithstanding their confidential nature, the Examiners' Reports could be made available to those

¹ * Under the 1998 Data Protection Act a research student has the right to request and see all written reports concerning them.

dealing with the appeal on behalf of the University and, with authorisation by the Vice-Principal, to the appellant.

- 9.2 Reports are disclosable under the terms of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, unless particular parts of them qualify for an exemption and Examiners should be aware of this when writing such Reports. However, specific authorisation must be obtained from the Vice-Principal before releasing under Freedom of Information.

10 Return of Thesis

- 10.1 Following the completion of the examination and the submission of the reports, the Examiners should return their copies of the thesis to the Academic Registry, Lord Balerno Building, Heriot-Watt University, Riccarton, Edinburgh EH14 4AS.

11 Examiners Fees and Expenses

- 11.1 Fees are payable to External Examiners on receipt of completed report forms. The Examiners' fees are determined and reviewed by the University Planning and Management Executive annually.
- 11.2 Information and queries concerning fees for examining research theses is set out within the University's Guidelines on Examiners fees and expenses (<http://www1.hw.ac.uk/registry/examinations/thesisexamination.htm>). Further queries should be directed to the Academic Registry (+44 (0) 131 451 3727; registry@hw.ac.uk).
- 11.3 It is essential that, on appointment, all UK tax-paying Examiners provide details of their National Insurance number and bank account, as requested, otherwise payment of fees may be delayed.
- 11.4 It should be noted that fees are normally paid in pounds sterling and at the month end only. Forms for the submission of the National Insurance Number and bank account details are available at: <http://www1.hw.ac.uk/registry/examinations/thesisexamination.htm>.
- 11.5 Reasonable expenses incurred in connection with an External Examiner's duties, including travel, accommodation and/or subsistence costs, should be itemised on an expense claim form. Expense claims will not normally be accepted in any other form and certainly not without all receipts attached. Bank account details are required in order to pay expenses. The form for the submission of such details may be found as indicated above.
- 11.6 Expenses are processed by the Academic Registry. They are normally processed immediately upon receipt of the report so long as the expense form is completed fully and correctly and the appropriate receipts are attached. Expenses are normally paid at the month end only. It should be noted that expense and fee payments may be processed separately.

12 Access to Further Information and Guidance Heriot-Watt University Regulations

- 12.1 The Heriot-Watt University Regulations governing Postgraduate Research Awards, as specified in Section 1.2 above, may be accessed at <http://www.hw.ac.uk/ordinances/regulations.pdf>.
- 12.2 Additional information relating to Postgraduate Research policies, procedures and standards pro-forma templates may be obtained at <http://www.hw.ac.uk/registry/>. The Clerk of the Postgraduate Studies Committee may also be contacted for general queries on (currently Mr Sam Bitar, S.Bitar@hw.ac.uk, +44 (0) 131 451 4575).