



Queen Margaret University

EDINBURGH

GUIDELINES FOR EXAMINERS OF THESES SUBMITTED AS PART OF THE DEGREE OF PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE (Health and Social Sciences)

Introduction

This document is intended to be a source of advice and guidance for external and internal examiners of theses submitted as part of a Professional Doctorate degree. QMU currently offers two Professional Doctorates:

1. Professional Doctorate in Health Psychology
2. Professional Doctorate in Health and Social Sciences

A Professional Doctorate is defined as an award equivalent in level to a PhD but including a number of taught elements. Its distinguishing feature is that it is focused on professional development, rather than research specifically. Therefore the emphasis of learning, teaching and assessment is on application to practice.

It is important to note that the thesis you are being asked to examine forms only part of each degree. Students will be assessed on a number of other competences and knowledge areas as part of the other modules making up the award.

This document should be read in conjunction with the Professional Doctorate Regulations (available at <http://www.qmu.ac.uk/graduate-school/Documents/Professional%20Doctorate%20Regulations%20Sept%202016.pdf>)

In the event of any inconsistencies, the regulations rather than the guidelines will apply.

The Examiners

To be awarded the Professional Doctorate the student has to pass all modules associated with their programme of study. For the current programme, these are:

- XD025 - Theory and Context of Professional Practice (90 credits)
- XD026 - Development and Evaluation of Professional Practice (90 credits)
- XD011 - Doctoral Research (60 credits)
- XD015 – Professional Doctorate Thesis (180 credits)

The thesis, which is the most substantial module, requires the candidate to conduct a research project and write it up in the form of a thesis. It is this thesis only which you are being asked to examine. Other modules will be marked and moderated separately by another examiner.

There are normally two examiners for every thesis, one external and one internal. Additional examiners may be appointed in certain circumstances. The thesis is examined on the basis of both the written work and an oral examination (viva).

Vivas are held at Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, unless the student has been granted special permission for it to be held elsewhere.

Alternative forms of assessment may exceptionally be agreed where a student has a specific disability or extenuating circumstance.

By agreeing to act as an examiner, you are agreeing to read the thesis, provide detailed feedback, attend the viva, write a joint report, and (depending on the outcome of the examination) to check amendments, read a resubmitted thesis or even hold a second viva.

External examiners will be paid an honorarium and travel and accommodation expenses will be covered.

Examiner Appointment Procedure

Supervisors of the student are responsible for approaching examiners and confirming their willingness to take on the role. Examination teams have to be approved by Graduate School Academic Board. All examiners will therefore be asked to complete a short CV form, detailing their qualifications and relevant research experience.

Once the team has been approved and the thesis submitted, the Graduate School will contact the examiners to confirm arrangements for the viva.

The External Examiner

The external examiner should be a specialist in the subject area of the thesis. Examiners should be entirely independent, and, where there is any interest which might prejudice this, it should be declared at the nomination stage. For example, examiners are required to declare an interest if they are:

- planning to employ the student
- planning to co-publish with the student
- a past student of the supervisor
- a 'regular' examiner for a particular supervisor or department in a department which has ongoing links with the student's department
- involved, or have been involved, with the student in a close personal relationship of any kind.

External examiners should not have been a member of staff or student at QMU within the last three years. If an external examiner is concerned about any possible links that may create a conflict of interest, they should declare this with their nomination. If a possible link emerges after the examination team has been approved (for example the student applies for a post in the examiner's department) the examiner should contact the Secretary of the Graduate School Academic Board for advice.

The Internal Examiner

The internal examiner need not be a subject specialist, but should have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the topic to enable him or her to judge the quality of the thesis and to play a full part in the examination. The internal examiner will normally act as Chair, and is responsible for completing all paperwork after the examination. Where the internal examiner has not examined at this level before, the Graduate School Academic Board will appoint an independent Chair.

While internal examiners will normally be members of staff of QMU, on occasion they may be previous members of staff who have recently left. No member of the student's current or previous supervisory team, including formal advisers or research collaborators, may act as an internal examiner.

Independent Chair of the Oral Examination

Where the internal examiner is inexperienced, the Graduate School Academic Board will appoint one of its members to act as independent Chair. The independent Chair is not required to read the thesis and will not ask any questions. The Chair is responsible for opening and closing the examination, completing all necessary paperwork, and ensuring due process is followed.

Assessment Criteria

To pass the research thesis module students must be able to:

- produce a detailed and critical literature review;
- autonomously construct and conduct a professional based research study;
- effectively utilise a consistently integrated and comprehensive approach to critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas, knowledge and professional information and issues;
- provide evidence of personal knowledge and understanding that generates professional research work that will have the potential to make a significant contribution to the development of the subject or discipline; and
- disseminate knowledge from their research work through a conference based presentation format and appropriate abstract.

The assessment for the module consists solely of a 45,000 word thesis describing a research project linked to the candidate's profession.

The Professional Doctorate thesis compared to the PhD thesis

Because the thesis only forms part of the assessment for a Professional Doctorate, it is not as substantial a piece of work as a PhD thesis. In terms of notional student effort, it represents about one third of the total effort required for a PhD. Therefore the scale of the research undertaken is likely to be less ambitious. Research will be practice-led, not theory-led, and is likely to be based in the candidate's workplace. The thesis will be much more focused on the project itself, rather than the wider context. Candidates are likely to devote less space to demonstrating their depth of knowledge of the field, as this will have been assessed elsewhere in the programme.

Although the thesis will be shorter than a traditional PhD, the quality of writing, argument and reflection should be the same. Examiners may find it helpful to compare the academic level with that of a journal paper.

Examiners are recommended to study the assessment criteria above and use these as a guide when reading the thesis. Examiners will come to their own conclusions as to how they would expect candidates to meet the criteria, but as a quick checklist we would suggest you look for evidence of the following:

The research questions have been clearly identified and placed in context.

- Relevant literature has been reviewed critically and analytically and related appropriately to the project.
- Methods chosen have been justified and awareness shown of alternatives. Study design is appropriate to answer the research questions.
- Possible limitations have been discussed.
- Research appears to have been properly implemented, with due regard to ethical considerations and professional practice.
- Data is analysed in appropriate depth and any conclusions drawn are justified by the evidence.
- The study is innovative enough to have the potential to contribute to practice.

In all cases, the thesis must have a coherent structure understandable by a scholar in the same general field with regard to aims, background, methods and conclusions; must be satisfactory in its literary presentation; and must conform to the regulations in respect of format and binding. Note, students are allowed to go no more than 10% over the word limit. If you are worried that a thesis is too long, or have any other queries about the presentation of the thesis, contact the Secretary of the Graduate School Academic Board for advice.

The examiners should make their judgement primarily on the basis of the thesis. A strong performance at viva may improve the outcome where doubts or concerns about the thesis are allayed. Normally, a weak performance will not detract from the outcome unless there are sufficient grounds to doubt whether the thesis is the student's own work.

Overall, examiners are asked to remember that the aim of a Professional Doctorate is not to produce a professional researcher, but a research competent professional. By awarding a pass, you are indicating the candidate is able to conduct research in so far as it relates to his or her wider professional role, probably as part of a team.

Finally, bear in mind that no percentage marks are awarded, only pass (potentially subject to amendments) or fail. The thesis does not require to be of excellent standard; merely satisfactory.

Research Misconduct

The research and the written submission must be the candidate's own work. An examiner who, in reading a thesis, discovers evidence of plagiarism, fabrication of results or other research misconduct should report the matter immediately to the Secretary of the Graduate School Academic Board.

Overview of the Examination Process

Dispatch of the Thesis

The Graduate School is responsible for liaising with the student and examiners to set the date for the viva. Graduate school will send out the thesis. Normally, six weeks are allowed for the examiners to read the thesis prior to the viva.

The Graduate school will also liaise with the external examiner regarding travel arrangements and overnight accommodation (if required), will book a suitable room for the viva and make all catering arrangements.

Preliminary reports

Each examiner should separately complete a preliminary report and submit it to Graduate School no less than two days before the viva. The examiners will not see each other's reports until all have been submitted. The preliminary report should include a provisional recommendation and indicate areas for further exploration at viva. Comparison of the reports will allow the examiners to agree a list of questions for the viva.

Examiners should remember that students may request sight of these reports following the viva.

In the event that the examiners feel the thesis is too poor academically to be worthy of examination, the oral examination will still be held, to allow the student the chance to discuss the thesis with the examiners. Contact the Secretary to the Graduate School Academic Board for advice.

Communication with the Candidate

The candidate and the examiners may not communicate with each other about the thesis before the examination.

The purpose of the viva

The oral examination is used to assess both the written submission and the candidate. It may serve a number of different functions, as follows:

- a) it provides the candidate with the opportunity to defend the thesis through high-level debate with experts in the subject
- b) it gives the examiners an opportunity to explore any doubts they may have about the material presented in the thesis
- c) it can be used to determine that the candidate is indeed the author of the written materials submitted
- d) where the research forms part of a collaboration, it can be used to determine the candidate's individual contribution to the project
- e) it enables the examiners to explore further the candidate's understanding of the theoretical framework, issues, methods and statistical analysis involved.

You may ask questions both about the material presented in the thesis and about the student's understanding of the wider topic area. However, bear in mind that the student will be assessed on broader professional knowledge in other modules.

Agenda

The normal agenda for the day will be as follows:

- Examiners meet and agree their line of questioning
- The candidate and observer are invited in. The oral examination is likely to take less time than that for a normal PhD so should normally last for between one and one and a half hours. If for some reason a longer examination is felt necessary, the candidate should be offered a rest pause at the end of two hours.
- The candidate and observer will then be asked to leave while the examiners come to their decision.
- The examiners' recommendation should then be communicated to the candidate.

Ideally, the examiners should agree and complete their joint report on the day, although this may be typed up by the internal examiner or independent Chair within 3 working days of the viva.

Conduct of the viva

Role of the Chair

The Chair is responsible for welcoming the candidate, explaining the format of the examination, and drawing the questions to a close. The Chair has a general responsibility for ensuring correct procedures are followed. This might include, for example, stepping in to curtail an inappropriate line of questioning, or inviting the observer to provide clarification (see below).

The Chair sets the tone of the examination, which should be conducted in a courteous spirit of academic debate. It is recommended that examiners start off with general comments to put the candidate at ease, and focus on the strengths of the thesis. More detailed questioning of specific points may then follow.

Role of the Observer

A member of the supervisory team may attend the oral, with the agreement of the candidate, as an observer. The observer may speak only with the examiners' agreement. This could be to comment on any practical or administrative difficulties in the pursuit of the research raised by the candidate. In exceptional cases the examiners may, if they wish, ask the supervisor to leave the room before the candidate to allow the candidate the opportunity to comment on his or her supervision.

The observer's main role is to be present throughout the discussion, to take notes and in particular to record any amendments required to ensure both supervisor and student have a shared understanding of the changes required.

Concluding the Examination

At the end of the examination the candidate and the supervisor should be asked to leave while the examiners confer. The candidate should be invited back to hear the decision. In giving the decision, the examiners should make it clear that the result is only a recommendation that has to be confirmed by the Graduate School Academic Board, and that the candidate will receive formal written notification, including a full list of required amendments (see below).

Possible decisions

Possible outcomes

The possible decisions are:

- a) the candidate be awarded a pass
- b) the candidate be awarded a pass subject to minor amendments, to be completed within two months
- c) the candidate be awarded a pass subject to major amendments, to be completed within six months
- d) the candidate be permitted to resubmit a substantially amended version of the thesis for re-examination, within twelve months. A second oral examination is normally obligatory.
- e) The candidate be neither awarded the degree, nor permitted to resubmit, nor awarded an alternative degree.

Deciding the outcome

Experienced examiners will have seen excellent, good and fair theses. It is worth remembering that undergraduate pass marks range from 40 upwards. It is important that examiners ensure that any thesis meets the SCQF criteria before an award can be recommended (the module descriptor is provided in Appendix 1). However, it is equally important to recognise that quality judgements have to be made.

The key question is: Does the thesis and performance at viva demonstrate that the student is ready to act as a research competent professional within the workplace?

If YES, the award of pass should be made, subject to amendments as necessary. Examiners should not be overly harsh regarding perceived deficiencies of the work providing this key criteria has been met.

If NO, what would the candidate have to do to demonstrate that readiness?

In an attempt to provide some guidance on the possible outcomes of the viva the following examples are provided:

- **Minor Amendments** – typographical and grammatical corrections; insert several new paragraphs in specified chapters; rework aspects of the conclusion; redraft the abstract.
- **Major Amendments** – all of the above plus rework up to half of the chapters of the thesis.
- **Resubmission** – all of the aspects of the minor amendments plus rework the majority of the chapters of the thesis; re-analyse data.

Examiners should award an outcome that is commensurate with the standard of amendments that are required, and not be influenced by the time permitted to attend to the amendments. In the event a student is unable to make the required amendments in the permitted timeframe, they may make a request for an extension from the Graduate School Academic Board.

Possible outcomes at second viva (following resubmission)

The possible outcomes are:

- a) the candidate be awarded a pass
- b) the candidate be awarded a pass subject to minor amendments, to be completed within two months
- c) the candidate be awarded a fail

Disagreements between examiners

Examiners are strongly encouraged to come to a unanimous decision whenever possible. Disagreement between examiners in the course of the examination may be described in the report, even in cases where a firm joint recommendation is eventually made.

Where the examiners are not able to come to a joint recommendation, separate final reports should be completed and signed. In this circumstance the Graduate School Academic Board may:

- accept a majority recommendation (provided that the majority includes at least one external examiner) .
- accept the recommendation of the external examiner
- require the appointment of new examiners to conduct an independent examination, including an oral examination.

Examiners' report

The Joint Report

A joint report signed by all the examiners must be completed after the viva and returned to the Graduate School at graduateschool@gmu.ac.uk.

The examiners should write the joint report together or, after detailed discussion and by agreement, one examiner (normally the internal) should write the report and send it on the other(s) for amendment and/or signature. However, if the report is not completed on the day it must be submitted to the Graduate School within three working days of the viva.

The report should be word processed on the form provided. The report must include:

- An assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis
- An assessment of the candidate's performance at viva
- A recommended decision/outcome of the examination.

If the decision is for amendments, confirmation of which examiner(s) will check the amendments. Minor amendments are normally checked by the internal examiner only, major amendments by both internal and external examiners.

If the decision is for a resubmission, confirmation that second viva will be required (only exceptionally would a second viva be waived).

ALL sections of the report must be completed.

Specification of amendments / revisions

The joint report must include sufficient information for the candidate to revise the thesis appropriately.

It is essential that the amendments listed are complete and clear. Guidance must be appropriately specific, preferably identifying where the amendments should be inserted and how many paragraphs or pages these are liable to represent.

The student is required to make only the amendments specified in the final report and examiners may not introduce new issues later, so it is worth taking time to make sure the list of amendments covers everything important.

Release of the Report to the Candidate

Following confirmation by the Graduate School Academic Board, the Graduate School will write to the candidate with the formal notification of the result, enclosing a copy of the joint report. This correspondence will confirm a submission deadline for the amended thesis, if applicable.

Once the candidate has amended their thesis, they will send it to the Graduate School, who will then coordinate the review process by the examiners.

Payment and Travel Expenses

Fees

External examiners will have to complete the 'Notification of new appointment form' and return it to the Graduate School, who will action payment following the viva.

Travel and Subsistence

External examiners may claim for travel and appropriate subsistence on the '*Expenses form – external claimants*'. The completed form and original receipts should be submitted to the Graduate School for payment by the Finance Department.

Appendix One – Module Descriptor

Title	The Prof Doc Thesis			XD015			
SHE Level	Doctoral	Semester & Mode of Study	1 and 2 F/ T , P/T	Doctoral			
SCQF Level	12			180			
Module Contributors	Doctoral qualified supervisors						
Pre-requisites	A candidate must accrue 150 points at SCQF level 12 before commencing on their thesis. This must include 60 points for the core doctoral research module.						
Prohibited combinations	None						
Aims							
The thesis aims to facilitate the candidate to consolidate doctoral skills through undertaking a sustained, coherent and robust piece of research of relevance to the professional context of the candidate.							
Learning Outcomes			Assessed in this module?	A ¹	B	C	D
On successful completion of the thesis the candidate will be able to:							
L1	Articulate a cogent, critical analysis of relevant evidence based material to justify the research undertaken. SCQF Level 12 characteristics 1,2,4		Yes	√	√		√
L2	Autonomously construct and conduct a research study of relevance to their professional context SCQF Level 12 characteristics 2,3,4,5		Yes	√	√	√	√
L3	Draw inferences from the data that add to the body of knowledge for the professional context. SCQF Level 12 characteristics 3, 5		Yes	√	√	√	√
L4	Defend the thesis during the viva voce examination, showing depth of understanding, skills of debate and clarity of argument. SCQF Level 12 characteristics 1,2,4,5		Yes	√	√	√	√
L5	Disseminate knowledge from their research work to a variety of audiences through presentations and writing. SCQF Level 12 characteristics 2,4 5			√	√		√
Learning Experiences							
The thesis is supported by supervision processes. Candidates can attend any workshops and seminars offered during the study weeks and are expected to seek out opportunities relevant to their own research development offered internally and externally. The regulatory requirements for supervision are 1 formal meeting per month (full time) and 1 formal meeting per 8 weeks(Part-time)							
Assessment Pattern							
Summative - 45,000 word thesis marked and judged by internal and external examiners through scrutiny and viva voce examination							
Can this Module be Anonymously marked?							
No							
Content							
Supervision by team of experienced and research-active staff							
Date 15/02/2016							

¹ A – Knowledge and Understanding B – Intellectual Skills C – Practical Skills D – Transferable Skills

Appendix Two – SCQF Level 12 Descriptors

SCQF LEVEL DESCRIPTORS

Available here: www.scqf.org.uk/content/files/SCQF_Level_Descriptors_for_website_-_Feb_2010%282%29.pdf

Knowledge an understanding

Demonstrate and/or work with:

- A critical overview of a subject/discipline, including critical understanding of the principal theories, principles and concepts.
- A critical, detailed and often leading knowledge and understanding at the forefront of one or more specialisms.
- Knowledge and understanding that is generated through personal research or equivalent work that makes a significant contribution to the development of the subject/discipline.

Practice: applied knowledge and understanding

- Use a significant range of the principal skills, techniques, practices and materials associated with a subject/discipline.
- Use and enhance a range of complex skills, techniques, practices and materials at the forefront of one or more specialisms.
- Apply a range of standard and specialised research/equivalent instruments and techniques of enquiry.
- Design and execute research, investigative or development projects to deal with new problems and issues.
- Demonstrate originality and creativity in the development and application of new knowledge, understanding and practices.
- Practice in the context of new problems and circumstances.

Generic cognitive skills

- Apply a constant and integrated approach to critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas, information and issues.
- Identify, conceptualise and offer original and creative insights into new, complex and abstract ideas, information and issues.
- Develop creative and original responses to problems and issues.
- Deal with very complex and/or new issues and make informed judgements in the absence of complete or consistent data/information.

Communication, ICT and numeracy skills

Use a significant range of advanced and specialised skills as appropriate to a subject/discipline, for example:

- Communicate at an appropriate level to a range of audiences and adapt communication to the context and purpose.
- Communicate at the standard of published academic work and/or critical dialogue and review with peers and experts in other specialisms.
- Use a range of software to support and enhance work at this level and specify software requirements to enhance work.
- Critically evaluate numerical and graphical data.

Autonomy, accountability and working with others

- Exercise a high level of autonomy and initiative in professional and equivalent activities.
- Take full responsibility for own work and/or significant responsibility for the work of others.
- Demonstrate leadership and/or originality in tackling and solving problems and issues.
- Work in ways which are reflective, self-critical and based on research/evidence.
- Deal with complex ethical and professional issues.
- Make informed judgements on new and emerging issues not addressed by current professional and/or ethical codes or practices.