

Guidelines for the Oral Examination of Higher Research Degrees

These guidelines explain how higher research degree oral examinations are organised and conducted at the University of Waikato. The oral examination provides an opportunity to assess the candidate's knowledge, understanding and critical engagement with their research and thesis. These guidelines apply once the written examination has resulted in a majority recommendation to proceed to oral examination and the candidate and supervisors have been notified. In the case of MPhil, an oral examination can be requested as an outcome of the written examination.

Oral Examination Procedure

1. Prior to the Oral Examination

- 1.1. The Chief Supervisor arranges the date and time of the oral examination in consultation with the candidate, other members of the supervision panel, and the examiner(s).
- 1.2. The examination date must normally be confirmed at least three weeks in advance, allowing time for the candidate to prepare and for the SGR to appoint a convenor.
- 1.3. If a convenor has not been appointed at least 72 hours before the examination, the examination may need to be rescheduled.
- 1.4. Examiners should not discuss their reports or potential outcomes prior to the oral examination unless facilitated by the convenor. There are circumstances where communication is beneficial, such as to seek clarification about questions provided by the non-attending examiner, or any issues raised in their report, to ensure they are representing them appropriately. Any such request should be made to the SGR or the convenor. Any communication between examiners in advance of the oral examination does not constitute part of the formal examination process.
- 1.5. With the support of their supervisory panel, a candidate may give an open seminar before the oral examination. This is optional and must be agreed in advance. Examiners may attend but are not required to do so. The seminar is not part of the examination, and examiners must not ask questions.

2. Attendance at the Oral Examination

- 2.1. The oral examination is considered a restricted setting and is not open to the public.
- 2.2. The following people would normally attend:
 - the candidate;
 - the examiner(s);
 - a convenor;
 - the chief supervisor and normally other members of the supervisory panel; and
 - any support person(s) invited by the candidate.
- 2.3. The NZ/Attending Examiner is required to attend the oral examination.
- 2.4. The Overseas Examiner is invited to attend online but is not required to do so.
- 2.5. The attending examiner will represent the content of both examination reports in the case that only one examiner is present.
- 2.6. In the case of a divergent examination, only the two examiners who indicated to proceed to oral examination will be invited to attend. The report of the divergent examiner will be provided to the

candidate to consider but is not required to be represented in the oral examination.

- 2.7. The convenor facilitates the examination and is responsible for ensuring that it is conducted fairly and in accordance with university requirements.

3. Support person(s) and whānau

- 3.1. A candidate may invite support person(s) and whānau to support their wellbeing and help them feel comfortable during the examination. A support person may be, for example, a friend, whānau/family member or fellow student.
- 3.2. Support person(s) or whānau attend only at the invitation of the candidate.
- 3.3. Support person(s) must not participate in the oral examination or ask questions. They should remain quiet during the presentation and discussion so that the examination can proceed without interruption.
- 3.4. The University does not specify a maximum number of support people, although the number would normally be small.
- 3.5. If the thesis is under embargo, the number of support person(s) is normally limited to two and may be required to sign confidentiality agreements or obtain other relevant permissions before attending.

4. Format of the oral examination

- 4.1. Each oral examination may vary slightly depending on the discipline, and whether the examination is being held in person or online, but will normally follow the format outlined below:
- The Chief Supervisor, examiner(s) and convenor meet briefly before the examination while the candidate waits outside the room.
 - The convenor invites the candidate and any support people into the examination.
 - The candidate gives a brief opening presentation, usually 10–20 minutes.
 - The examiner(s) ask questions and discuss the research with the candidate. Discussion continues until the examiner(s) have explored the substantive issues they wish to address.
 - The candidate and support people leave the room while the examiner(s), convenor and Chief Supervisor discuss the examination recommendation.
 - The candidate is invited back into the room and advised of the recommendation.
- 4.2. Only the examiner(s) present may ask the candidate questions during the examination.
- 4.3. The oral examination is intended to be an academic discussion. Questions are not limited to those identified in the written examination reports, and candidates should be prepared to discuss any aspect of their thesis or related areas of their field.
- 4.4. The content of the opening presentation is not prescribed. However, a candidate might consider the following points:
- the key research question or problem and why it is important;
 - how the research was undertaken;
 - the key findings; and
 - the wider implications or contribution of the research.

5. Online participation

- 5.1. Any participant may attend online, and an oral examination may be fully online or hybrid.
- 5.2. It is recommended that the candidate, convenor and chief supervisor attend in person. If the candidate needs to attend online, a fully online examination is recommended
- 5.3. Oral examinations should normally be held using Microsoft Teams, the University's preferred platform.

- 5.4. The meeting should be scheduled for at least 3 hours and must not be recorded.
- 5.5. Participants attending online should keep their cameras on throughout the examination and test their camera, microphone and connection in advance.
- 5.6. A contingency plan should be in place in case of connection or technical problems:
- the convenor should have a copy of the candidate's presentation;
 - the candidate should test screen sharing in advance; and
 - the Chief Supervisor should have a mobile contact number for each participant so that technical issues or postponement can be communicated if necessary.
- 5.7. Participants attending online must join from a private location that is free from background noise
- 5.8. Participation by mobile phone is not permitted because of limitations in video quality and reliability.
- 5.9. The convenor may postpone the examination if technical problems prevent the examination from proceeding fairly and effectively. If a lost connection cannot be restored, the examination must not continue by telephone and should be rescheduled.

6. Outcomes of the oral examination

At the conclusion of the oral examination, the attending examiner(s) will make one of the following recommendations:

- a. That the thesis be accepted in its present form with no revisions (final thesis for completion should be submitted within 2 weeks of the oral examination);
- b. That the thesis be accepted for the award subject to the completion of minor revisions (final thesis for completion should be submitted within 4 weeks of the oral examination);
- c. That the thesis be accepted for the award subject to the completion of major amendments (final thesis for completion should be submitted within 10 weeks of the oral examination);
- d. That the thesis should not be accepted for the award and the candidate may revise it and resubmit it for examination after a minimum re-enrolment period of 6 months*;
- e. That the thesis should not be accepted for the degree of PhD but be accepted as fulfilling the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy (MPhil)**;
- f. That the thesis does not meet the required standard and no degree should be awarded.

*Option (d) is not available following re-examination.

**Only applicable to PhD and professional doctorates

Roles and Responsibilities

7. The Chief Supervisor is responsible for:

- arranging a date and time that suits the candidate, attending examiner(s) and convenor, and confirming the **date, time, location and attendees** with SGR at least three weeks in advance;
- arranging a suitable examination room and any required audiovisual facilities, stationery and refreshments;
- arranging any approved examiner expenses, including travel, and thesis postage if requested;
- arranging transport or University parking for attending examiners where necessary;
- greeting attending examiners and accompanying them to the examination room where appropriate;
- liaising with the convenor before the examination about arrangements and process;
- supporting the candidate to prepare for the examination, including ensuring they understand the examiners' reports and any identified areas for discussion; and
- notifying the SGR promptly of any changes or issues that may affect the examination.

8. The Convenor is responsible for:

- reviewing the examination reports and thesis abstract;
- contacting the Chief Supervisor to confirm arrangements, process and responsibility for recording any required amendments during the examination (noting that this is usually the chief supervisor);
- contacting the candidate to ensure they understand how the examination will proceed and to answer any questions about the process;
- contacting the examiner(s) to introduce themselves and provide a point of contact;
- facilitating any necessary communication between examiners before the examination.
- arriving at least ten minutes before the scheduled start time to greet the candidate and examiner(s) and confirm they understand how the examination will proceed;
- reminding those present that only the examiner(s) may question the candidate;
- facilitating the examination without participating in the academic discussion;
- ensuring the examination is conducted fairly and appropriately;
- calling a break if necessary, such as if the candidate becomes distressed;
- terminating the examination if proceedings become inappropriate or confrontational and cannot be resolved; and
- ensuring that relevant issues raised by any non-attending examiner are appropriately represented by the attending examiner(s).
- returning the oral examination outcome sheet to the SGR following conclusion of the examination.
- notifying the SGR immediately of any potential issues such as delays in the examination or no-shows of the examination panel, so that alternative arrangements can be organised.

9. The School of Graduate Research is responsible for:

- appointing a convenor;
- providing the convenor with the examination reports, thesis abstract and oral examination outcome sheet;
- providing the examination reports to the attending examiner(s);
- confirming the date, time and location of the examination with the candidate, supervision panel, examiner(s) and convenor;
- receiving the completed outcome sheet and formally notifying the candidate of the outcome; and
- acting as the primary contact for any issues affecting the examination.

10. The Candidate is responsible for:

- arriving at least ten minutes before the scheduled start time;
- inviting any support people and advising the convenor how many will attend;
- where the thesis is under embargo, ensuring that any required confidentiality agreements or permissions are in place for support people;
- reading and considering the examiners' reports carefully;
- preparing a short opening presentation;
- engaging openly and constructively in the academic discussion with the examiner(s); and
- be prepared to explain and discuss their research decisions.

Contact

If an issue arises during an oral examination, please contact the SGR
Higher Research Degrees Manager / 0220109911

