Note to Examiners of theses for the MPhil in Earth Sciences and MPhil in Geography (examined by thesis and oral)

This note provides advice specific to this Faculty and should be read in conjunction with the Board of Graduate Studies' Guide to Examiners.

In case of doubt, please do not hesitate to contact us, but you might also wish to refer to our website https://www.dcesg.physsci.cam.ac.uk/examiner/examinerresearchdegree, where the process is set out in full.

The University of Cambridge respects equality and diversity. We recommend that all examiners complete appropriate training offered by their institutions and watch the Royal Society’s brief presentation on Understanding unconscious bias https://youtu.be/dVp9Z5k0dEE.

Your reports

Examiners’ pre-viva reports should be written independently, without conferral, and signed and dated before the oral examination; please also complete the coversheet (Form MPhil1) independently.

You should provide a detailed report, no less than one side of A4, on the thesis for consideration by experts in the field concerned, including:

- a clear indication of the contents of the thesis and contribution it makes to the subject
- an opinion on the quality of the work and the originality shown by the candidate
- an opinion on the general style of writing and presentation
- a statement as to how much of the work involved is new and evidently the student’s own

Your report should conclude with a brief summary of your opinion, with a firm recommendation as to whether the Degree should be awarded (see section 5 of the Board of Graduate Studies’ Guide).

The student should not send any additional documents directly to you; should you receive any such documents they should not be examined.

The oral examination

The Internal Examiner liaises with the External Examiner and student to arrange the oral examination at a mutually convenient time. The oral is compulsory; however, if the thesis is a revised version, you may agree to waive the oral in some circumstances (see section 7 of the Board’s Guide).

Some Examiners ask for a structured presentation to be given at the start of the viva (poster, powerpoint etc). This is by no means a requirement. If you do require a presentation you should notify the candidate at least two weeks before the scheduled viva date. Please be clear about the form of presentation you are expecting.

If a candidate discloses a disability that may affect the conduct of the examination, we will let you know and make sure that appropriate arrangements can be made. In exceptional circumstances you may make an application to conduct the oral by video conference. If you wish to do this, please contact us before you proceed to make arrangements.
After the oral examination

Your joint report can, if the result is very straightforward, be a brief comment on the candidate’s overall performance in the thesis and viva, including any correction advice. Should the examiners’ pre-viva recommendations differ significantly, or one or both examiners wish to reserve judgement on their recommendation until after the viva, the joint report should clearly articulate how any concerns were addressed and how the joint recommendation was reached.

Please write your joint report on coversheet MPhil2, or supply it as a separate file. In either case, please make sure you complete the coversheet, making a firm joint recommendation by indicating one outcome, and both sign and date the form.

In this Faculty, we suggest that if the candidate is required only to make very minor corrections, that these are made and approved by the Examiner(s) before the reports and correction approval are sent to the Degree Committee. In which case, please let the student know what is required and ask him/her to return one corrected version (which may be in electronic or bound copy) to the Internal Examiner for checking.

However, where corrections are likely to take more than a few days and in every case if revision and resubmission of the work for re-examination is required, the reports should be returned to the Degree Committee Office immediately after the oral with clear specifications for corrections or revision as relevant.

Returning the reports

Examination reports are considered by the Degree Committee at one of the 10 meetings held each year, and the student is formally notified of the outcome of their examination shortly after. After arranging the viva you may wish to consult the Degree Committee meeting schedule at https://www.dcesg.physsci.cam.ac.uk/Welcome/meetings-schedule. The deadline for receipt of examination reports is the end of Monday in the week preceding the Degree Committee meeting.

The Internal Examiner will be responsible for returning the papers to the Degree Committee Office:

- Signed copies of each Examiner’s independent report and Form MPhil1 (original signatures, not electronic)
- Form MPhil2 with your post-oral joint report, either on the form or attached, and signed by both (original signatures, not electronic)
- Your expenses claim forms, with receipts attached as relevant (can be emailed later – scans acceptable)
- If corrections have already been completed, please send us the completed Form MPhil3

In all other cases in which corrections are needed, please send us the competed Form MPhil3 as soon as possible to tell us that they have been completed to your satisfaction.

What happens to your reports?

Once the Degree Committee has deliberated on your reports and decided on the outcome, we will write to the candidate and send the reports to him or her and to the supervisor.

If the student’s thesis is to be entered into a prize competition, the University reserves the right to provide the reports as supporting evidence to the jury.

Thank you for your kind assistance