Note to Examiners of PhD theses in the Faculty of Earth Sciences & Geography

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.

Writing your reports

Your pre-viva reports should be written independently, without conferral, and signed and dated before the oral examination; please also complete the coversheet (Form PhD1) independently.

Please make a detailed report, no less than one side of A4, for consideration by experts in the field concerned, giving:

- 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

Include a brief summary of the salient points, in terms accessible to non-experts in the field, and, if possible, a 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 PhD2, 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 your reports
Examination reports are considered by the Degree Committee at one of the 10 meetings held each year, after which the Committee makes a recommendation to the Board of Graduate Studies. 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:

- **One** signed copy of each Examiner’s independent report and Form PhD1 (original signatures – not electronic)
- **Form PhD2** with your post-oral joint report, either on the form or attached, and signed by both (original signatures – not electronic)
- The candidate’s summary of the thesis, signed by both Examiners as a fair summary
- Your expenses claim forms, with receipts attached as relevant (can be emailed later – scans acceptable)
- If corrections have already been completed, please also send us the completed Form PhD3.

Corrections

*Please send your reports to us right away, and do not wait for the corrections to be done.*

If corrections are needed, the corrected work will be sent by the candidate direct to the examiner(s) responsible for checking them within the deadline set by the Board of Graduate Studies (usually three months for minor corrections or six months for major corrections). When the corrections have been checked and are completed to your satisfaction please send the Degree Committee Office the completed Form PhD3 as soon as possible.

What happens to your reports?

Once the Board of Graduate Studies has deliberated on your reports and decided on the outcome, they 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.