

HELP, I'm an Internal Examiner! What now?

The integrity of the assessment of our research students relies heavily on the expertise and dedication of our internal and external examiners. We are very grateful to you for your contribution to this assessment process. The guide below sets out some of the key responsibilities of an internal examiner across the assessment process.

BEFORE the viva voce:

1. **Agreeing to participate.** Normally, an internal examiner is approached by the supervisor or DTLP in the School to check your availability and whether there are any potential conflicts of interest. Usually there is some plan in terms of the proposed date for the viva voce if the student is a PhD candidate, so you have sight of the expected timeframe. If you are reading this, you have probably already responded positively to this request!
2. The DTLP will nominate both the internal and external examiners to me as Dean for approval, through the Academic Registry. Once I have approved the examiners, Michelle Grealley (gsothese@tcd.ie) will contact you as Internal Examiner and share a folder with you. The folder contains the electronic files relevant to the student. Check you can **access the shared folder** and contact Michelle if there are any difficulties.
3. Once you have received the folder link, **contact the External Examiner** to check that they have also received the link and can access the file. This step is essential as some university firewalls block emails with links to folders so it is important that contact is made with the external examiner.
4. **Agreeing a time, date and venue.** Although Schools differ in terms of their approach, normally the internal examiner is the key contact link with the external examiner to confirm when and where the viva voce will take place. Remember that if it is proposed that the viva be held online, a written record is required to show that the student agreed to this format. In some Schools, the internal examiner is also responsible for booking a room, if the viva is planned as in-person. You should also check who will be the Chair for the viva. Schools may differ in their practices in terms of how the responsibilities for logistical arrangements are shared across the Internal Examiner, Chair and administrative staff within the School.
5. **Review the work submitted.** Normally, we aim to ensure examiners have eight weeks to read and assess the work submitted before the viva voce. In your assessment it is helpful to identify areas you wish to further explore in the viva with the student, as well as corrections that you may require the student to complete. This information will be invaluable in completing the [pre-viva assessment form](#).
6. **Liaising with the external examiner** about the pre-viva form. **One week before the viva**, examiners are expected to share their [pre-viva assessment form](#) with each other. Examiners often arrange an online meeting to discuss each other's reports and agree a plan for how to structure the viva voce examination. This process ensures that there is time to plan the viva itself including prioritising and ordering the areas for discussion to ensure that any concerns identified can be addressed during the viva. As internal examiner, you should also send both forms to Michelle (gsothese@tcd.ie) **one week before** the viva.
7. **Ensure relevant meeting links have been shared** with the external examiner for the viva voce itself if it is to be held online, and if possible, check that the external examiner can open the link and navigate to the relevant meeting.

DURING the viva voce

1. Ensure that any areas of concern that were identified are explored. Often examiners' primary decision is whether any areas that require discussion fall into the category of minor corrections or major revisions. It's important that you satisfy yourself that in the case of the former, the student has the relevant information to complete corrections in the text and does not require extensive further research or reading to access that information.
2. Insofar as possible, avoid overlap in questions with the external examiner, to save time and ensure all areas can be addressed.
3. Ensure that the student is as comfortable as is reasonable to expect in what is always a stressful situation. Check whether a break is needed during the viva if you notice the student becoming tired or if you or the external examiner need a short pause. While there is no hard-and-fast rule, the viva voce does not normally exceed two hours and if it seems likely that it will, then it is important that a break is included for everyone's sake. Normally, this aspect of the viva is the responsibility of the Chair, but it is useful for you to also be aware and you should feel free to flag any concerns you have during the viva.

IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING the viva voce

1. Discuss with the external examiner and **agree a final joint recommendation**, i.e., to
 - a. Award the PhD for the thesis as it stands.
 - b. Recommend the award of a PhD subject to minor corrections for which normally two months are allowed for full-time students, and three months for those who are part-time.
 - c. Recommend major revisions and re-examination. This option implies that the examiners are not yet satisfied that the work can be recommended for the award of PhD, but have sufficient confidence to feel that with further work, it may well reach that standard. Normally students are permitted six months (or nine months if part-time) to complete these revisions. The thesis is then re-examined by the same examiners but there is no further viva voce.
 - d. Refer the work for the award of a lower degree. This option normally only applies if the examiners feel that very substantial work would be needed for the work to make the kind of contribution that is required of a PhD, implying that the student would have to register again as a research student.
 - e. Recommend that the thesis be failed – in other words very substantial work would be needed even to bring the work to the level of a Master's degree.

It is important that examiners agree a joint recommendation. If there is disagreement – as can happen – the Chair will try to find a resolution and may refer the matter to me as Dean in extreme circumstances. If despite all attempts, no agreed recommendation is possible, unfortunately a new examination process will have to be initiated. This option is so difficult for all involved that we strongly urge examiners to find some common ground and a shared recommendation.

2. Once agreement is reached, complete and sign the joint [post-viva form](#). This should be done on the day, immediately following your discussions, while everyone is still together (even if virtually). As internal examiner, **you are responsible for submitting the joint post-viva report form** to Michelle Greally at gsothese@tcd.ie **within 24 hours of the viva voce**. If the viva was conducted online, you may need to scan the form to send it to the external examiner. Both signatures are required and are essential in the case of any appeal brought by the student.
3. **If you recommended minor corrections**, ensure that the full list of corrections that the student is required to undertake is included on the Post-Viva Assessment Form you signed.

As Dean, I approve these forms. **Students are only required to complete the corrections that I have approved.** You may well have annotated elements onto the thesis itself and shared this with the student, with a guide that the student should attend to those annotations. This is often helpful for everyone, but as I will not have approved those annotations, in practice the student is not required to address them. Therefore make sure that any essential corrections are listed in the form. It can be helpful to also note if you have provided an annotated copy of the thesis to the student. Once I have approved your recommendation (i.e., the Post-Viva Assessment Form), the student will be notified and will be sent the form so they can see the corrections that have been required. They will have two months to complete these corrections, from the date that the AR contacts them.

- 4. If you recommended major revisions and re-examination.** Agree with the external examiner what the priority areas for revision should be. Sometimes examiners divide the topics up and separately indicate the revisions required under a series of headings. Most often, major revisions involve re-visiting elements of the methods or findings sections. If further data collection and/or analysis is required, ensure that clear instructions are provided for the student as to the extent and nature of the work involved. While this may be explicitly discussed during the viva, students are often too tired and stressed to process information effectively and need explicit written instructions that they can refer to after they have had a chance to recover from the viva voce.

AFTER the viva voce

- 1. If you recommended minor corrections,** as internal examiner, you are responsible for signing off on those corrections. The external examiner is not involved, though sometimes they are happy to be contacted. The student should submit the corrected thesis to you, usually with a table that sets out how they have responded to the corrections required, for easy cross reference. You should anticipate that you will receive this file within 8 weeks of the viva voce. If you know you will be away and unavailable, it is important to share that information with the student and their supervisor, so that expectations can be managed.
- 2. Advise the AR (gsothese@tcd.ie) that corrections have been completed** as soon as you are satisfied that the corrections map onto those required by both examiners. Your approval of the corrections triggers the process that allows the student to submit a final version of their thesis for the university record and allows their name to go forward to Council for approval for the award of PhD.
- 3. If you recommended MAJOR REVISIONS and RE-EXAMINATION** you will be notified by the AR when the revised thesis has been submitted for examination and you will be sent a link to the relevant folder. Each examiner is requested to submit independent examination reports on the revised thesis to gsothese@tcd.ie, so you are not required to link with the external examiner, although there is often contact between examiners during this process. If the examiners disagree on the recommendation at this stage, you may be contacted by me as Dean to try to reach an agreement, but for the most part, your responsibilities end at this point.

SUMMARY of RESPONSIBILITIES OF INTERNAL EXAMINERS

<p style="text-align: center;">BEFORE the Viva Voce Examination</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact the External Examiner • Agree date, time and venue for exam • Submit pre-viva assessment form to gsothese@tcd.ie at least one week before the Viva Voce • Agree structure and focus of Viva Voce questions
<p style="text-align: center;">DURING the Viva Voce</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure relevant areas are explored • Agree a recommendation with the External Examiner
<p style="text-align: center;">IMMEDIATELY AFTER the Viva Voce</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete and sign the Post-Viva Assessment Form and submit to gsothese@tcd.ie within 24 hours of the exam. Ensure the external examiner has also signed the form
<p style="text-align: center;">FOLLOWING the Viva Voce</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sign off on Minor Corrections by contacting the AR (gsothese@tcd.ie) • Re-examine the thesis if you recommended Major Revisions and Re-Examination

Feel free to contact genadgso@tcd.ie or myself as Dean (dngirstd@tcd.ie) if you have any queries about the process or are unsure about a recommendation. Your DTLP will also be able to provide guidance. Once again, our thanks to you for your invaluable contribution to this critical process.