

Faculty of Science PhD examination process including viva voce (30 Oct 2025: approved by GSC; 13 Nov 2025 approved by Faculty Exec)

PhD examinations that include a viva voce component are mandatory for students who registered for a PhD from 2025 onwards.

Nomination of Examiners

The candidate will submit a “Declaration of Intention to Submit” form 3 months before the planned thesis submission date. Supervisors will nominate three examiners, including one international examiner, at least 6 weeks before the planned submission date, as per Faculty Standing orders. At the time of initial contact with a proposed examiner, the supervisor will notify the examiner that acceptance of the invitation to examine includes accepting being part of the viva voce process in addition to examination of the written thesis. Examiner nominations will be approved by the GSC.

Preliminary Examination

The thesis will be sent out for examination and examiners will have 6 weeks to produce their “Preliminary Examiner Report”. At this time, the examiner will be notified by the faculty office of the anticipated timeframe within which the viva voce will take place. In their report, the examiner will provide a detailed analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the work performed and provide a list of corrections and revisions that the candidate is required to complete. The examiner will also be requested to prepare a list of queries or questions they do not believe were adequately addressed in the written work for subsequent discussion at the viva voce. At this stage, the examiner will need to select one of the following options:

1. Thesis standard is acceptable for candidate to proceed to viva voce.
2. Thesis standard is unacceptable for candidate to proceed to viva voce and it requires substantial revision and submission for re-examination.
3. Thesis standard falls well below the PhD requirement and it is rejected outright with no option for revision.

Preliminary examiner reports will be sent to the GSC for approval. If the examiners unanimously select option 1, the candidate will proceed directly to the viva voce, which should be arranged as soon as possible after receipt of the examiner reports on a date that suits all parties. The target timeframe for scheduling the viva voce is between 2 and 4 weeks from receipt of the reports. The examiner reports will be shared with the supervisor, who will share them with the candidate. The specific list of viva voce questions and queries requested from the examiner will not be shared with the supervisor. No corrections or revisions will be submitted by the candidate at this stage; corrections will be completed after the viva voce process is completed and the final examiner reports have been received.

Should one or more examiners select option 2, the candidate will be provided with the opportunity to revise the thesis and submit it for re-examination within 3 months of receipt of the examiner reports. Depending on the outcome of the re-examination, the student may then proceed to the viva voce or the thesis will be rejected outright. Only one round of re-examination will be permitted.

Should one of the examiners select option 3, an *ad hoc* committee will meet and make a recommendation to the GSC on the way forward. Members of the *ad hoc* committee will be

selected by the GSC Chairperson. Should two or more examiners select option 3, the thesis will be rejected and the candidate will not be permitted to register again for a PhD for a period of 2 years.

Viva voce

A viva voce or oral defence is a mandatory component of the examination process for the award of a PhD degree. As part of this process, the candidate will be required to make an oral presentation covering key aspects of their PhD research work and relevant findings to an examination committee composed of three examiners and a non-examining chair (NEC). The viva voce is part of the same examination process as the assessment of the written thesis and therefore the same three examiners will form part of the viva voce examination committee. In the event that an examiner is unavailable for reasons of ill-health or on other serious grounds, the School GSC representative will nominate an alternative examiner for participation in the viva voce. This examiner nomination will be approved by the GSC in the usual way.

The NEC will be a senior academic at the level of Professor or Associate Professor within the relevant School, nominated by the GSC representative, who has had no direct involvement with the candidate's PhD research work. Examiners will have the opportunity to pose questions to the candidate and the candidate will need to demonstrate appropriate specialist knowledge in the field in which their research work was conducted.

Viva voce process

The faculty office will be responsible for the formal scheduling of the viva voce, in consultation with the GSC representative of the School. Two weeks before the viva voce, the faculty office will share the three examiner reports with all three examiners and the NEC. On the day of the viva voce, prior to the candidate's presentation, the NEC will meet online with the examiners to discuss possible questions that will be put to the candidate and to answer any procedural queries the examiners may have. The examiners will have broad leeway with respect to the questions posed to the candidate and they will not be expected to limit questions to those previously noted in their preliminary reports. On the day of the viva voce, which will preferably be held in hybrid format, the candidate will have the opportunity to present their thesis work for 30 minutes. This presentation will be open to all members of the university community and the public and is expected to be made in person by the candidate at a venue on campus suitable for hosting hybrid events. If, for some valid reason, the hybrid format is not possible then the event will be held online.

The three examiners, the supervisor (in the capacity of observer), the candidate and a non-examining chair will stay in the meeting after the candidate's presentation for a closed session. The School GSC representative may also be present at the closed session in the capacity of observer. The candidate, supervisor, NEC and any local examiners will be present in person, if possible, while examiners from further afield will be present online. During the closed session the candidate will answer questions posed by the three examiners to test the candidate's expertise in the relevant field and the novelty of the work presented. The NEC will closely manage the question and answer session to ensure that it is conducted fairly. This stage of the process may take between 30 minutes and 1 hour, with discretion being granted to the NEC to decide if the process needs to continue beyond this point. After completion of the question and answer session, the supervisor and candidate will leave the meeting and the NEC and the three examiners will have a brief closing discussion. The GSC representative, if present, may remain in

the meeting. During this discussion, the NEC will determine whether or not there is consensus between the examiners. In cases where there is not consensus, the NEC will draft a short report after the meeting, detailing reasons for the differences of opinion vis-à-vis the outcome, for forwarding to the GSC chairperson. This report should be forwarded to the GSC chairperson within one week of the viva voce.

Final examiner reports

After the viva voce has taken place, each examiner will modify their original report to produce a final examiner report that needs to be submitted to the faculty office within 2 weeks of the viva voce. At this stage, the examiner will make one of the following recommendations:

1. The student has met the degree requirements and the PhD can be awarded after corrections and revisions to be completed to the satisfaction of the HoS.
2. The student has failed to meet the degree requirements and the PhD shall not be awarded.

The final examiner reports, together with the recommendation for the award of the PhD (or not), will be approved by the GSC. In cases where two examiners select option 1 and one examiner selects option 2, an *ad hoc* committee will meet and the report from the NEC will be considered as part of this meeting. The *ad hoc* committee will make a recommendation to the GSC as to the final outcome. Should two or more examiners select option 2 then the degree will not be awarded and the candidate will not be able to register again for the degree for a period of 2 years.

Final thesis submission

The candidate will be given a period of 3 months to complete the required corrections to the thesis and final submission should take place within this period. The candidate will be qualified at this time should they have met the manuscript submission requirement.