Research Degree Examiners' Reports: Guidance for examiners

1. Information and guidance on the examination process is provided in the Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes ("the Regulations and Code"), available on the University's website at http://www.bris.ac.uk/esu/pg/cop-research-degrees.html. Section 9: Assessment is of particular relevance.

2. Examiners must complete independent preliminary reports before the oral examination and a joint report after the oral examination (template reports are available at http://www.bristol.ac.uk/directory/exams/staff/research-degrees-staff-information/). Taken together, the examiners' reports must enable the Research Degrees Examination Board (RDEB) to assess the scope and significance of the work submitted by the candidate and to determine whether the candidate satisfies the University's criteria for the award of the research degree as set out in Annex 7 of the Regulations and Code and in the regulations for the specific degree, contained in Annexes 1 and 2 of the Regulations and Code.

3. The examiners' individual preliminary reports record their assessment of the candidate’s submitted work (dissertation or published work) and identify topics for discussion during the oral examination. Examiners must exchange their preliminary reports prior to the oral examination. Examiners should bear in mind that reports will be made available to candidates after being considered by the RDEB.

4. The internal examiner (or Independent Chair if appointed) is responsible for making practical arrangements for the oral examination, including: liaising with the external examiner(s) to set a date, booking suitable accommodation and refreshments, and giving the Academic Quality and Policy Office (AQPO), the supervisor and the candidate at least ten days’ notice of the time and place of the examination.

5. The examiners' joint final report after the oral examination sets out their assessment of the candidate and their submitted work and makes a firm recommendation on the award, with appropriate justification, to RDEB. Where the joint report differs in its findings from any of the preliminary reports, examiners should justify the changes in their joint report. If examiners cannot agree their joint report, they should submit separate final reports.

6. Examiners should comment on the strengths, as well as any weaknesses, of the candidate's work. Reports need to be informative and specific to the candidate and his/her submitted work. Generic reports will not be accepted.
7. Examiners' individual and joint reports should address the following issues:
   (a) purpose of the research and the overall approach taken;
   (b) candidate's application of research methods;
   (c) candidate's review of the literature;
   (d) extent of any collaboration;
   (e) candidate's contribution to the advancement of knowledge in the subject represented;
   (f) literary form and quality of presentation of the work submitted, and the inferences that can be drawn about the candidate's ability to present and defend intellectual arguments in writing;
   (g) candidate's general knowledge of the subject and
   (h) candidate's performance in the oral examination, and the inferences that can be drawn about the candidate's ability to present and defend intellectual arguments verbally.

The examiners' recommendation should consider the criteria set out in Annex 7 (criteria for award of research degrees) of the Regulations and Code, as well as any specific criteria contained in the regulations for the individual award (included in Annexes 1 and 2 of the Regulations and Code).

8. Where the recommendation involves correction of errors of substance, or resubmission, examiners should attach clear, comprehensive guidance for the candidate to the final report. For minor errors, examiners should make clear to the candidate, in writing, the corrections required.

9. Examiners may inform the candidate of their recommendation but should ensure that the candidate understands that the recommendation may not be accepted by RDEB. Examiners and candidates must be aware that no award will be made, or deadlines for any corrections formally agreed, until the reports have been considered by the Board.

10. The University welcomes comments from examiners on any aspect of the research degree examination process. Examiners are invited to comment on the process in confidence to AQPO (pgr-exams@bristol.ac.uk) for consideration by RDEB.

11. The internal examiner (or the Independent Chair if appointed) is responsible for ensuring that the examiners' independent preliminary examination reports and their final report(s) are sent, via the agreed school administrative processes, for countersigning by the Head of School (or nominee). If the Head of School or nominee is the candidate's supervisor or internal examiner, an alternative senior academic staff member of the school should sign the form. The forms should then be sent electronically to AQPO (pgr-exams@bristol.ac.uk) to arrive no later than two weeks after the date of the oral examination.

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