



**UNIVERSITY OF
PLYMOUTH**

Doctoral College

**NOTES OF GUIDANCE FOR EXAMINERS
OF THE RESEARCH DEGREES**

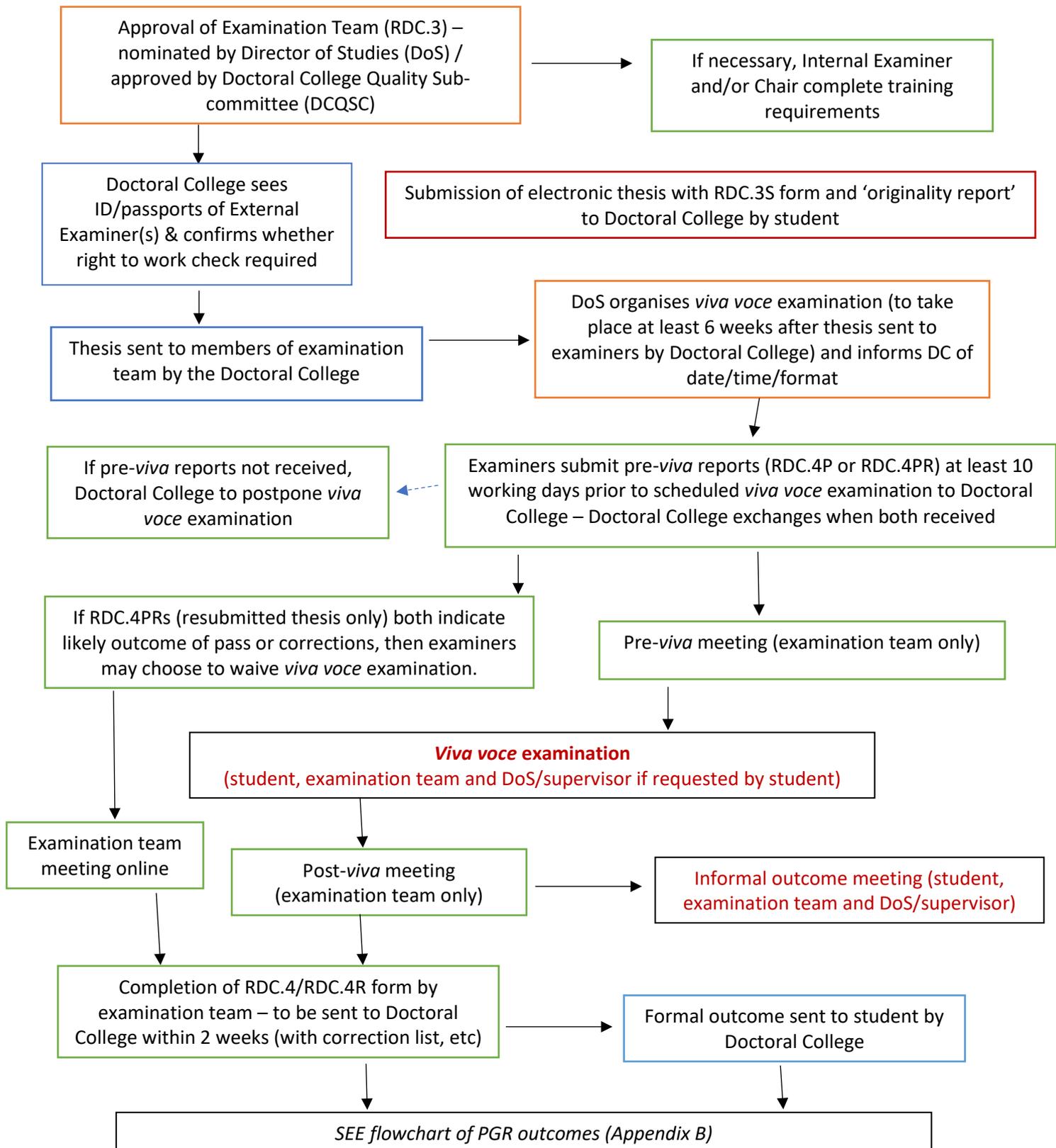
**RESEARCH MASTERS (ResM),
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY (MPhil),
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (PhD),
DOCTOR OF MEDICINE (MD),
AND PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATES***

* unless otherwise noted in their programme specification documents

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Flowchart for *viva voce* examinations



1. Appointment of Examiners

- 1.1. Students are usually examined by one internal and one external examiner. If the student is a member of academic or research staff of the University, then two external examiners and one non-examining Chair are required.
- 1.2. Examiners are approached in the first instance by the student's Director of Studies (DoS), at least four months before the intended submission of the thesis (or any part thereof if it includes practice).
 - a. The School in which the student is located then formally nominates all examiners and examination teams to the University's Doctoral College Quality Sub-Committee, which is responsible for approving all nominations.
 - b. Examination teams have not been formally appointed until the Doctoral College sends appointment letters to all members, copied to the Director of Studies.
- 1.3. Criteria for examiners:
 - a. no examiner, unless there are exceptional circumstances, will have acted as supervisor or advisor to the student during this research degree (other than, for internal examiners, in the course of annual monitoring processes, or as expert commentator for project approval (RDC.1) or Confirmation of Route (RDC.2) milestones¹),
 - b. an external examiner will not normally have held any appointment with the University during the period in which the student has been registered for the degree, nor had any formal supervisory or advisory relationship with the student,
 - c. at least one examiner must have experience of examining UK Research Degree students. In an examination for PhD, at least one examiner must have experience of PhD examining,
 - d. no person who is registered for a research degree may act as an examiner,
 - e. the selection of external examiners is subject to the University's general requirements. Details of any past or current association or relationship with the University, its staff or students must be declared at the time the examination arrangements are considered, and
 - f. internal examiners and Chairs must fulfil the current training requirements set by the Doctoral College, normally at least 4 weeks prior to the *viva voce* examination.
- 1.4. For full details about the appointment of examiners and the requirements of the examination team (including the appointment of Chairs and their roles), please see the *Research Degrees Staff Manual*.

¹ Subject to local guidelines; in some Faculties, internal examiners are not permitted to have acted as expert commentator for the Confirmation of Route (RDC.2) process.

- 1.5. It is the responsibility of the Doctoral College to determine and pay fees and expenses to external examiners, following receipt of all required paperwork.
- 1.6. The University is required to follow the UK Home Office's "right to work" guidelines for all external examiners. This means that a University staff member will need to see the passports of *all* external examiners.
 - a. For external examiners located in the UK, this is normally the physical passport. The University will ensure that this process is both quick and secure, if it is necessary to do this by post/courier.
 - b. Please note that external examiners who are located, and undertake *all* examining duties (including the *viva voce* examination) from, outside of the UK, currently do not need to demonstrate the right to work in the UK.

2. Organisation and Planning of the Oral (Viva Voce) Examination

- 2.1. *Viva voce* examinations are required for all students who submit theses. The only exception is in the case of resubmitted theses where both examiners agree, having read the resubmitted thesis, that a second *viva voce* examination may be waived. (Please see 13.3 below).
- 2.2. The Director of Studies is responsible for making arrangements for the *viva voce* examination and they must keep the internal and external examiners, the Chair (if relevant), the student and the Doctoral College informed of the date and schedule for the examination.
- 2.3. There are 3 possible formats for oral examinations:
 - a. traditional 'in person' *vivas*, where all participants are in the same room, normally on a University campus (If it is necessary for the examination to be held elsewhere, this must be approved by the Director of the Doctoral College or delegate);
 - b. remote' *vivas*, where participants all attend separately by video conference;
 - c. 'hybrid' *vivas*, where some participants are on campus and some attend remotely. If this is the case, then one of the participants on campus must be the student and, in the same room, either the Internal Examiner or the Chair (at least).
- 2.4. The format of the *viva* is to be determined in negotiation with all participants. However, it is expected that most *vivas* will be held 'remotely'.
 - a. 'Remote' and 'hybrid' *vivas* always require a Chair to be appointed via the RDC.3 process as part of the supervisory team.
 - b. If the external examiner is based outside the UK and does not have the right to work at the University, then the *viva* must be either 'remote' or 'hybrid'.

- c. In the case of 'remote' or 'hybrid' *vivas*, all participants must confirm to the Director of Studies prior to scheduling that they have the resources (including the bandwidth) to hold the *viva* remotely with no anticipated disruption. If this cannot be confirmed, the DoS should contact the Doctoral College to discuss alternatives and options.
 - d. The Doctoral College will only pay for an external examiner to travel to Plymouth for a *viva* if the student is also in Plymouth for the *viva*.
 - e. Some elements of the thesis may need to be examined *in situ* (e.g. in the case of creative or professional practice). Examiners should confirm that they are able to commit to this prior to accepting the appointment. In such cases, it is not necessary to hold the *viva voce* examination during the same visit or, subsequently, in the same format (i.e. 'in person').
- 2.5.** The *viva voce* examination should normally be scheduled no sooner than 6 weeks from the date the thesis is sent to the examiners and no later than 3 months thereafter. DoSs must not confirm the date of the *viva voce* examination until after the Doctoral College has sent the thesis to the examiners.
- 2.6.** All *viva voce* examinations must:
- a. make reasonable adjustments for students or examiners if required;
 - b. allow sufficient time in their scheduling to establish how and/or whether the student meets the degree level criteria, although students should not have to face an excessively long examination without good reason.
- 2.7.** The DoS organising an 'in person' *viva voce* examination must ensure that it:
- a. is held in an accessible room that is quiet and not subject to telephone or other interruptions;
 - b. uses a table large enough to accommodate the required number of theses, papers, diagrams, etc.;
 - c. has drinking water available; and
 - d. has available a waiting area for the student and supervisor to use that is not within hearing range of the examination room.
- 2.8.** Zoom (video conferencing app) is the University's preferred platform for remote and hybrid *vivas* (although others are also acceptable).
- a. Zoom is available to all University staff members and generic guidance is available on [this page](#) (see in particular, 'Interactive Small Group sessions'), which also links to videos, etc. Tips to keep the Zoom session secure are available [here](#).
 - b. The Zoom meeting for the *viva* should be set up by either the Internal Examiner or the Chair (to agree between them). This is to enable the recording of the *viva* if necessary (see below).

- 2.9.** The University is committed to making **reasonable adjustments** to the oral examination for students who require them. These should be organised as far in advance as possible. In such cases, a non-examining Chair will be appointed to the examination team to support all participants.

3. Thesis Submission

- 3.1.** It is entirely the student's decision to submit their thesis for examination; they do not require their Director of Studies' approval to do so.
- 3.2.** The written element of the thesis must be presented in English, unless agreed by the Doctoral College Quality Sub-committee. Its presentation is expected to be of a high standard in line with the University of Plymouth's *Research Degrees Handbook*.
- a.** Students are required to submit their theses (or any written elements of them, in the case of practice-research projects) in digital form, online, via GradBook.
 - b.** Examiners will receive a link from the Doctoral College, in order to access a copy of the thesis and other relevant documentation.
 - c.** Should you require a print out of the thesis, please email doctoralcollege@plymouth.ac.uk.
- 3.3.** Work submitted for another degree may not form part of the submission for the research degree (except in the case of a collaboratively produced co-authored thesis examined simultaneously or co-authored elements within a thesis which may potentially appear in another person's degree submission).
- 3.4.** All submissions made after 1 September 2021, must include an 'originality report' generated via Turnitin.
- 3.5.** The thesis may include non-written forms of research presentation (e.g. creative or professional practice) or else research outputs, including articles, published or made public during the course of the degree registration.
- a.** In such cases, the nature and form of the thesis must be approved by the examiners prior to submission. Please note that there is always an expectation that in addition to these outputs, the thesis will include an introduction (outlining research aims, enquiry, methodology and defining key terms as well as positioning within one or more fields of study) and conclusion (including a clear statement of the contribution to knowledge, in the case of a doctorate).

- b. In cases where individual elements of the thesis are co-authored and/or co-produced, the student's specific role as a researcher within these elements must be clearly indicated within the thesis and it must be explained how this contributes to the overarching methodology of their research project as represented by the thesis as a whole. Normally it would be expected that the student is the named first author (or disciplinary equivalent) of any publication included as part of the thesis and that a statement is provided by each co-author confirming the student's contribution.
- c. For copyright reasons, it is only possible to include Open Access publications or else 'green' final manuscript versions of articles/papers that have been accepted for publication within theses submitted to the University repository.
- d. The thesis as a whole must be framed as a single coherent research project and meet the relevant QAA Framework for Higher Education criteria for qualifications at Masters (Level 7) or Doctoral (Level 8) level (as appropriate to the degree).

4. The Role of the Examiners Prior to Oral Examination

- 4.1. The Doctoral College will distribute electronic copies of the thesis and 'originality report' to each examiner (and Chair, if appointed) as soon as possible on receipt, together with these Notes of Guidance for Examiners, Pre-viva Report Form (RDC.4P/4PR), Recommendation of Examiners Form (RDC.4/4R) and expenses claim and honorarium forms, as appropriate.
- 4.2. Prior to the *viva voce* examination, both examiners must:
 - a. read the thesis carefully and engage with any non-written elements if relevant;
 - b. identify shortcomings in the thesis/research, with explicit consideration of the relevant QAA level descriptor (i.e. assessment criteria);
 - c. review the 'originality report' (See 4.3 below), and notify the Doctoral College immediately should they suspect academic dishonesty or plagiarism;
 - d. prepare appropriate questions with which to challenge the student and enable them to demonstrate the fulfilment of the assessment criteria; and
 - e. identify any editorial/presentational corrections needed to improve the final version of the thesis. The marked up version of the thesis may be given (if hard copy) or sent to the student at the close of the examination; this must be noted in the formal notification of the examination outcome (i.e. list of corrections).
- 4.3. For examiners who require further guidance on understanding the 'originality report', the University has prepared a video called 'Reading a Downloaded Turnitin Report'.

- a. This can be found on via the following page in a section called 'Generic documents for examiners and chairs':
<https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/student-life/your-studies/research-degrees/examiners-chairs-and-supervisors/examiners-and-chairs>.
 - b. For Internal Examiners & Chairs, there is also guidance on Moodle in a section called 'Turnitin guidance for PGR examiners'. Plus, further generic guidance is available for staff at
<https://dle.plymouth.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=26610>.
- 4.4.** At least 10 working days in advance of the *viva voce* examination, each examiner must submit a pre-*viva* report (RDC.4P or RDC.4PR in the case of resubmitted theses) to the Doctoral College. These reports will be exchanged between examiners and a copy given to the Chair if appointed.
- a. At this stage, examiners may also request that the student make a brief presentation at the *viva voce* examination, to be prepared in advance (students can also request to make a presentation at the *viva voce* examination, but this must be requested via the Director of Studies and approved by both examiners at least 10 working days in advance of the *viva voce* examination).
 - b. Copies of the pre-*viva* reports are held by the Doctoral College. Under UK GDPR, students have the right to request to see examiners' comments (if this is the case, these will only be given to the student after the oral examination). If examiners wish their comments to remain confidential, they should advise the University when they submit them and explain the issues which give rise to their concern.
- 4.5.** Examiners are asked to read [this document](#) produced by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in response to concerns expressed by PhD students about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their ability to carry out research and who have needed to replan and reschedule their research to accommodate the obstacles they have encountered.
- 4.6.** Examiners may not discuss any element of the thesis with either the student or supervisor(s) prior to the oral examination.
- a. They also must not discuss any elements of the thesis with the other examiner until after both pre-*viva* reports are submitted.
 - b. It is permissible to raise issues in advance with the Chair of the *viva voce* examination where one has been appointed, who should consult with the Doctoral College if required.
- 4.7.** It may be necessary for examiners to engage in some elements of the thesis (e.g. performance or exhibition) some time prior to the submission of the written element or the *viva voce* examination. If this is the case, the examiners may not discuss this work with the student – except in general and non-critical ways which do not represent formative feedback – prior to the *viva voce* examination meeting.

5. The Pre-Viva Meeting

- 5.1. The pre-viva meeting cannot take place until the examiners' independent pre-viva reports (RDC.4P/PR) have been sent to the Doctoral College. The Doctoral College will exchange them between the examiners and send copies to the Chair (if there is one) when they have both been received.
- 5.2. The pre-*viva* meeting is when the examiners meet to develop an agenda or plan of questioning that takes into account their pre-viva reports.
 - a. Pre-*viva* meetings normally last 30-60 minutes.
 - b. The Chair is expected to take notes of what is agreed, to be submitted to the Doctoral College following the *viva* (if there is no Chair, then the Internal Examiner); the pre-*viva* meeting normally should not be audio or video recorded.
 - c. It is attended by the examination team only (that is, the examiners and the Chair). No members of the student's supervisory team may be present at this meeting.
- 5.3. For 'in person' *vivas*, the pre-*viva* meeting usually takes place immediately before the *viva voce* examination itself. However, examination teams may choose to organise this earlier (for example, the day before) if this is more convenient, especially for a remote *viva*.
- 5.4. For 'remote' or 'hybrid' *vivas*, this is also an opportunity to test the video conferencing platform, to ensure that it operates smoothly and that the examiners understand its functionality. It is recommended that the pre-*viva* meeting is set up separately from the *viva* examination itself on Zoom (or other video conferencing platform) by either the Internal Examiner or Chair.

6. The Oral Examination (Viva Voce Examination)

- 6.1. It is the responsibility of the Internal Examiner – and the principal duty of the Chair if one is appointed – to ensure that the examination is conducted fairly and professionally, and in accordance with University regulations. (In other words, when a non-examining Independent Chair has *not* been appointed, the Internal Examiner will act as Chair for the *viva voce* examination. Please see the following section.)
- 6.2. All examiners and the Chair (if appointed) shall be present at the *viva voce* examination.
- 6.3. The student should let their Director of Studies know whether they would like one of their supervisors to be present at the *viva voce* examination. The student's wishes should be passed on to the Internal Examiner/Chair prior to the *viva voce* examination.
 - a. The attending supervisor may only contribute to or participate in the discussion if explicitly requested by one of the examiners, and must withdraw prior to the deliberations of the examiners on the outcome of the examination. During a remote *viva*, their camera and mic should be switched off and they should not send chat messages to other participants.

- 6.9.** After this, either:
- a.** the student (and, if relevant, Director of Studies/supervisor) must be told when the 'Informal outcome meeting' (see below) will take place, or how they will be contacted to join this meeting (at which point the student and, if relevant, supervisor must withdraw); or
 - b.** the examiners ask that the student and, if relevant, supervisor withdraw while they reach a decision and complete the paperwork. In exceptional circumstances, the supervisor may be asked to withdraw and the student asked further questions (where it is thought that student/supervisor relationships may have affected the thesis/research). There may also be a situation where the student is asked to withdraw and the supervisor is asked further questions. This may be the case, for instance, if it appears that the student has failed to heed advice given or else has encountered difficulties along their research journey (e.g. changes to the supervisory team, etc.).
- 6.10.** Following the *viva voce* examination, the examiners and Chair are asked to complete a brief form for the Doctoral College, reflecting on the conduct of the examination and offering any feedback on the process.

7. Chairing the Viva Voce Examination

- 7.1.** The main purpose of a Chair is to enable the student and examiners to concentrate on the content and discussion, rather than the form and format.
- a.** The Chair is also responsible for ensuring that the *viva* is run fairly and professionally, and that the student is not placed under undue stress or disadvantaged by the form of the *viva*.
 - b.** In the case of Internal Examiners who have not examined at the University of Plymouth before, Chairs support and advise them in relation to regulations, expectations, examination outcomes and processes, and paperwork.
 - c.** In the case of staff students who are being examined by two External Examiners, Chairs are responsible for the meeting of University regulations, expectations and paperwork.
 - d.** Chairs are responsible for: (in the case of remote/hybrid vivas) setting up the pre-*viva* meeting, *viva voce* examination and Informal Outcome meeting on Zoom or similar (can be delegated to Internal Examiner); formally introducing and concluding the *viva voce* examination and Informal Outcome meeting; taking notes during the pre-*viva* meeting; taking notes and/or recording the *viva voce* examination.
- 7.2.** Chairs should be appraised (normally by the Doctoral College) of any 'reasonable adjustments' required and ensure that they are fulfilled with sensitivity.

- 7.3. The Chair should have contact details (e.g. phone, email, WhatsApp) for the examiners, student and Director of Studies/supervisor, in case the technology used for a remote or hybrid *viva* fails, in order to call the student and DoS to the post-*viva* meeting, etc. The Internal Examiner should also have contact details for the Chair.
- 7.4. The Chair is delegated to stop a *viva* in progress and to postpone/reschedule if they believe its form, technology or situation is proving not to be in the best interest of the student or hindering their performance.
- a. The Doctoral College must be informed at the earliest opportunity if this happens; advice, if necessary, will be available from either the [Director or a Deputy Director of the Doctoral College](#) about how to proceed.
 - b. At the start of the *viva*, the Chair should state that they may need to stop or reschedule should there be circumstances hindering the student's performance; this should be captured on a recording or in their notes.

8. Examination Outcomes

- 8.1. No examination outcome may be suggested to the student or their supervisors prior to the *viva voce* examination or until the questioning and discussion with the student is completed.
- 8.2. Recipients of ResM or MPhil degrees must meet the [QAA Framework for Higher Education](#) criteria for qualifications at Level 7 at (at least) threshold level. Level 7 research degrees should include the results of an appropriate research programme or a critical analysis of existing knowledge in a defined field.
- 8.3. Recipients of PhD, MD or Professional Doctorate degrees must meet the [QAA Framework for Higher Education](#) criteria for qualifications at Level 8 at (at least) threshold level. The thesis should include a distinct contribution to the current knowledge of the subject(s) identified, demonstrate systematic study and independent, critical and original powers and should be suitable for publication in whole or in part.
- 8.4. Following the *viva voce* examination, the examiners must recommend one of the following outcomes, based on the [QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications](#) (FHEQ) at the relevant level:
- a. Pass: the degree be awarded. The examining team may provide advisory guidance on editorial corrections to the thesis, such as minor typographical or grammatical errors; or
 - b. Corrections: the thesis is satisfactory in substance, but the examiners have identified shortcomings in the shaping or articulation of the research. Corrections to be made to the satisfaction of one or all of the examiners by six months from the date of the formal notification of the outcome of the examination; or

- c. Defer – resubmission allowed. The thesis is unsatisfactory in substance, with shortcomings in the presentation and/or content, and may require further research. The student is permitted to resubmit for the degree (with detailed advice) and be re-examined on one further occasion by twelve months from the date of the formal notification of the outcome of the examination; or
- d. Compensatory award: the degree for which the research student is examined is not to be awarded but a lower level degree (MPhil, ResM, PgCert or PgDip) or, in the case of Professional Doctorates, and where the individual regulations for each Professional Doctorate allow, an appropriate master level degree be awarded subject to the presentation of the thesis being amended to the satisfaction of the examiners by one month from the date of the formal notification of the outcome of the examination; or
- e. Fail: the degree not to be awarded and the student not be permitted to be re-examined.

9. Post-viva Meeting and Recommendation of Examiners Form (RDC.4 or RDC.4R)

- 9.1. The purpose of the Post-viva Meeting is to determine the outcome of the examination (See 8.4 above), on the basis of the thesis and *viva voce* examination.
- 9.2. This meeting is attended by the examination team only (the examiners and Chair). It normally takes place immediately following the *viva voce* examination or else after a short break. It could therefore be a continuation of the *viva voce* examination on Zoom (after the student and DoS/supervisor, if relevant, have logged out or are assigned to a 'break out room') or could be set up as a separate meeting.
- 9.3. During this meeting, the Internal Examiner (or Chair) should note both the outcome and the reasons for it, in addition to corrections or additional research required in general terms.
 - a. This will be fed back to the student during the Informal outcome meeting (See Section 10 below) that follows and then formalized via the submission of the [RDC.4/4R form](#) and list of corrections/report to the Doctoral College within 10 working days.
 - b. Either the Director of Studies or Chair should inform the examiners, before the recommended outcome of the examination is determined, of any exceptional circumstances which might have affected the student's performance adversely (should these be known).
 - c. It is recommended that the RDC.4 form (RDC.4R in the case of a resubmitted thesis) is completed during the post-*viva* meeting.
- 9.4. The Recommendation of Examiners Form (RDC.4 or RDC.4R in the case of a resubmission), which is sent to the Internal Examiner or the Chair when one has been appointed, should be completed as soon as possible after the *viva voce* examination, in consultation with the external examiner(s).

- a. It is the Internal Examiner's (or Chair's, if one has been appointed) responsibility to arrange for the post-*viva* report to be filled in and sent to the Doctoral College.
 - b. For an 'in person' viva, the form must be completed, signed by all members of the examination team, and returned to the Doctoral College office as soon as possible after the examination and within 10 working days at the latest. Lists of specific corrections for the student may follow within 10 working days of the *viva voce* examination and should not hold up the completion and submission of the RDC.4/4R.
 - c. In the case of the RDC.4 or RDC.4R forms for remote/hybrid vivas, physical signatures are not required; however, this form must come from the email account of either the Chair or Internal Examiner, CCed to all members of the examination team, and all other signatories need to email the Doctoral College to confirm their agreement with the contents of the form.
- 9.5.** The RDC.4/4R form indicates the nature of the response required for many of the questions but the examiners must pay particular attention to the appropriateness of their recommended outcome.
- 9.6.** Note that a Pass (8.4a above) should be awarded when the examiners are happy to approve the thesis with no further amendments.
- a. Any minor editorial corrections listed and supplied to the student with this outcome are purely advisory; the student is not required to respond to them prior to supplying the final version of their thesis for the award of their degree.
 - b. For further details of the procedure, see Section 11 below (and Flowchart in Appendix B)
- 9.7.** In the case of recommendation 8.4b above ('Corrections'), it must be agreed and noted on the RDC.4/4R who will check the final version of the thesis (Internal Examiner or External Examiner or both) to ensure that all required corrections are made.
- c. The student should be told the general nature of the corrections before leaving the *viva* room. This must be followed up with a clear list in writing (to the Doctoral College within 10 working days).
 - d. It is also possible to give the student an annotated copy of the thesis that indicates some or all of the corrections required (this should be noted both on the RDC.4/4R form and on any supplementary correction lists or documents).
 - e. Please note that examiners cannot request additional corrections after submitting these requirements to the Doctoral College and the student's fulfilment of these requirements will be judged solely on their response to the original corrections identified by the examiners in writing.
 - f. For further details of the procedure, see Section 12 below (and Flowchart in Appendix B).

- 9.8.** In the case of recommendation 8.4c above (Deferral - Resubmission), the examiners must be explicit about the nature of the work to be done for the student to meet the threshold criteria of the degree.
- a.** In addition to the full completion of the RDC.4 form, the examiners must provide a separate document (no briefer than 1 side of A4) describing this work to the Doctoral College. This document will be forwarded to the student.
 - b.** Please note that students must have clear and unambiguous instructions, as they will be judged solely on their response to those instructions at the time of resubmission. This is to ensure that examiners do not ask for further modifications at that time, except for those that arise from the revision itself.
 - c.** For further details of the procedure, see Section 13 below (and Flowchart in Appendix B).
- 9.9.** In the case of recommendation 8.4d above (Compensatory lower degree awarded), the examiners must clearly indicate in Section 3 of the RDC.4/4R why the student did not meet the threshold criteria for the degree.
- a.** They may also supply a list of required corrections for the award of the lower degree. These corrections, to be submitted within one month of the formal notification of the outcome of the *viva voce* examination, must be checked by the Internal Examiner (or Chair if there is no Internal Examiner).
 - b.** Additionally, all references to the higher degree must be amended to that of the lower degree to be awarded.
 - c.** Examiners must indicate which degree they recommend be awarded; advice is available from the Doctoral College if required.
 - d.** For further details of the procedure, see Section 14 below (and Flowchart in Appendix B)
- 9.10.** In the case of recommendation 8.4e above (Fail – no degree awarded), Section 3 of the RDC.4/4R form and any supporting documents must be very clear about the grounds for rejection of the thesis, which should align with the [QAA Framework for Higher Education](#) criteria for qualifications at the relevant level. Please note that a student may request to see any documentation related to their examination.
- 9.11.** Where the examiners' recommendations are not unanimous and an outcome cannot be agreed:
- a.** Contact the Doctoral College and, if available, either the Director or relevant Deputy Director of the Doctoral College may be able to come to the examination room or give advice to the examination team by telephone.
 - b.** If this is not possible or an agreed outcome still cannot be reached, each examiner must present a separate report and RDC.4/4R form to the Doctoral College as soon as possible.

- c. The student must be told and it should be explained to them that the Doctoral College will write to them as soon as possible to keep them apprised of the situation.
 - d. In the case of 9.12b above, the Doctoral College Director will normally appoint an additional external examiner to arbitrate and shall consider the reports of all examiners before reaching a decision; or may exceptionally accept the recommendation of the external examiner(s).
- 9.12.** If there are any doubts about the completion of the RDC.4 (or RDC.4R in the case of resubmissions), please contact the Doctoral College.
- 9.13.** It must be remembered that the main grounds for appeal against a result are related to either the conduct of the examination and/or lack of clarity about the requirements of corrections or a resubmitted thesis in the formal notification document provided to the student.

10. Informal Outcome Meeting

- 10.1.** Once an examination outcome is agreed, the student and supervisor should be invited back into the examination room for a statement of the outcome. If this is not 'good news' then it should be offered with as much tact, clarity and sensitivity as possible.
- 10.2.** This meeting is attended by the examination team, the student and, usually, the Director of Studies or other supervisor. It normally takes place immediately following the post-viva meeting or else after a short break. It could therefore be a continuation of the post-viva meeting – with the student and DoS being contacted by the Chair to rejoin – or else it could be set up as a separate meeting at a fixed time later in the day.
- a. The purpose of this meeting is to informally share the examination outcome with the student and DoS and, if relevant, any corrections or additional research that is required, and the process that will be followed.
 - b. The student is encouraged to ask for any further information or clarification that they require.
- 10.3.** It should be remembered that the formal outcome notification and final list of corrections/requirements will be sent to the student by the Doctoral College.
- 10.4.** It is appropriate to hold a virtual celebration of the student's achievements following the notification of the outcome, to take time to 'network' and discuss ways forward for the student's research (e.g. publication etc.) where appropriate. Alternatively, if the outcome is not what was desired, it is important that the Chair and DoS ensure that the student is supported during and following this meeting.
- 10.5.** Should the examiners not agree on the examination outcome (See 9.12 above), the Chair may decide not to hold an Informal outcome meeting with the examiners present; they may, instead, inform the student and their DoS of the situation and what will happen next by either video or phone call.

11. Award of a 'Pass' Degree: Procedure

- 11.1.** On agreement by the examiners that the student has passed and the degree be awarded (recommendation 8.4a above), the student will be asked to submit an electronic copy of the thesis to the University's repository. The expectation is for the student to submit this electronic copy of the thesis within 2 months of the formal notification of the outcome by the Doctoral College.
- 11.2.** Examiners may provide a list of editorial corrections comprising minor typographical or grammatical errors to the student, either at the close of the *viva voce* examination or else within 10 working days via the Doctoral College (to be sent with the formal examination outcome letter). Please note that it is the student's decision whether to make these recommended amendments to their thesis and this will not be checked or monitored.
- 11.3.** The award will not be given until the electronic copy of the thesis has been submitted to the University repository (PEARL) and the submission been approved by the Doctoral College and any outstanding academic debts to the University have been paid. Please note that students are entitled to request an embargo period for their thesis.
- 11.4.** The Doctoral College will arrange for the certificate to be produced and will notify the Exams and Awards Office that the student is eligible to attend the next Graduation Ceremony.

12. Corrections to the Thesis: Procedure

- 12.1.** On agreement of the examiners that the thesis is satisfactory in substance, but that there are shortcomings in the shaping or articulation of the research (recommendation 8.4b above), the student must be informed of the corrections required to the thesis and the date by which these should be made at the end of the oral examination. If not submitted with the RDC.4/4R form, the list of corrections must be sent to the Doctoral College, to be forwarded to the student, within 10 working days of the *viva voce* examination. Corrections are to be approved by the internal and/or the external examiner(s) and not the Chair. The student should be told by the examiners the form in which to submit the corrections; normally an electronic copy with the changes/corrections tracked, highlighted or tagged is preferred, with a cover sheet indicating where each correction can be found.
- 12.2.** The corrections must be made and submitted to the Doctoral College to send to the Internal Examiner and/or the External Examiner (as indicated on the RDC.4/4R) within six months of the formal notification of the outcome. If a student is unable to meet this deadline, they may request an extension; all extensions must be approved by the examiners.

- 12.3.** Corrections are not an iterative process between the student and examiners and examiners are not expected to act as mentors or advisors during this process. If a student has any queries, they should ask their Director of Studies or other supervisor to liaise with the examiners on their behalf.
- 12.4.** In the case of corrections arising from a first *viva voce* examination, the examiner(s) must complete Corrections Report Form COR.1 and return it to the Doctoral College within 20 working days of receiving the corrections.
- a.** If for any reason they are unable to consider these corrections and respond within 20 working days, the Doctoral College should be notified so the student may be informed of the delay.
 - b.** Please remember that examiners may not expect or require the student to make any corrections that were not on the List of Corrections sent to them by the Doctoral College with the formal notification of their examination outcome.
 - c.** If these corrections are approved, see 12.6 below.
 - d.** If the corrections are not approved, and these have been submitted for the first time for a thesis that had *not* been resubmitted as the result of a deferral, then the student is entitled to a '2nd attempt'. Examiners must use form COR.1 to identify the ways in which the corrections were deficient and also list the corrections that are still required. Please see Appendix B ('Flowchart of PGR Examination Outcomes').
- 12.5.** If the corrections are submitted either for the second time or else to a thesis that had been resubmitted as the result of a deferral, the examiners must complete Corrections Report Form COR.2 and return it to the Doctoral College within 20 days of receiving the corrections.
- a.** If these corrections are approved, see 12.6 below.
 - b.** If these corrections are not approved, then the examiners must use form COR.2 to recommend either:
 - (i)** That the student receives a compensatory lower award: that is, the degree for which the student has been examined is not to be awarded but a lower level degree (MPhil, ResM, PgCert or PgDip) or in the case of Professional Doctorates and where the individual regulations for each Professional Doctorate allow, an appropriate master level degree be awarded. Please note that corrections that require approval by examiners are not permitted with this outcome (although the student must make amendments to references to the level of the degree and examiners may provide a list of recommended typographical corrections which the student may choose not to attend to), or
 - (ii)** That the student fails: the degree not to be awarded and the student not be permitted to be re-examined.
- Please see Appendix B ('Flowchart of PGR Examination Outcomes').

- 12.6. If the corrections are approved, or a compensatory lower award is recommended, the degree will be awarded when the electronic copy of the final corrected thesis has been submitted to the University repository (PEARL), the submission been approved by the Doctoral College and any outstanding academic debts to the University have been paid. In the case of a lower degree being awarded, the student must amend the title of the degree on the cover page as well as any references to the level of the degree throughout the thesis.
- 12.7. The Doctoral College will arrange for the certificate to be produced and will notify the Exams and Awards Office that the student is eligible to attend the next Graduation Ceremony.

13. Resubmission following Deferral: Procedure

- 13.1. A thesis may be re-submitted (i.e. 're-examined') on one occasion. Details of any further research requirements must be submitted by the examination team to the Doctoral College who will then forward them to the research student (see 9.8 above) following the first *viva voce* examination. Failure to resubmit by the deadline will normally be regarded as failure of the examination. However, if a student is unable to meet this deadline, they may request an extension.
- 13.2. A resubmitted thesis is normally examined by the same examination team. Should either examiner be unavailable, or a (different) Chair required, the Director of Studies must nominate the entire examination team (via the RDC.3 form on Gradbook), preferably four months prior to submission of the revised thesis, which must be approved by the Doctoral College Quality Sub-committee. It is strongly recommended that a Chair is appointed for the examination of a resubmitted thesis, even if one had not been appointed to the original examination team.
- 13.3. If, having read the resubmitted thesis, the examiners agree that the outcome of the examination will be either 'pass' or 'corrections', they have the discretion to waive the requirement to hold a second *viva voce* examination.
 - a. The examiners should tell the Doctoral College if this is the case no later than 10 working days prior to the scheduled *viva* (although preferably at least a month in advance so that the student may be told not to arrange travel, etc.) See 13.5 below for further details of processes to follow.
 - b. Before the examiners agree the outcome of 'award of lower degree', or 'fail, no award' for a resubmitted thesis, a second *viva voce* examination is mandatory. [Please note that this is *not* the case for outcome decisions following the submission of Corrections to a thesis]
- 13.4. The examination for a resubmitted thesis should be run as per Items 1-10 above, with the following two exceptions: 1) a second *viva* may be waived (see 13.3 above); and 2) the examination outcome 8.4c (deferral – resubmission) is *not* available for resubmitted theses. Please see the attached 'Flowchart of PGR Examination Outcomes'.

- 13.5. If the *viva voce* examination is waived for the resubmitted thesis, the examination team must return the RDC.4R form and any List of Corrections within either 3 months of the thesis having been sent to them by the Doctoral College or else within 2 weeks of the scheduled *viva* that had been waived (whichever comes first).
- 13.6. The examination team (without the student or supervisor present) must hold a meeting (normally by video conferencing) to discuss and agree the thesis and examination outcome. Normally the Chair, if one has been appointed, is responsible for completing the RDC.4R form and, if required, the examiners agree and complete the List of Corrections. The completed form needs to be emailed to the Doctoral College, copied to all members of the examination team; those members with outstanding signatures can indicate their approval in a 'reply all' email in lieu of a signature.

14. Compensatory/Lower Award: Procedure

- 14.1. In the case of a compensatory or lower award (recommendation 8.4d), when the thesis does not require any corrections, the student will be asked to submit an electronic copy of the thesis to the University's repository within two months of the formal notification of the outcome.
 - a. The student must amend the title of the degree on the cover page as well as any references to the level of the degree throughout the thesis. These are not considered 'corrections' and do not need to be approved by a member of the examination team.
 - b. Please note that this also applies to compensatory awards recommended when corrections are not approved (see 12.5 above).
- 14.2. On agreement of the examiners that the thesis requires further corrections in order to meet the criteria for a lower award, the student must be informed of the corrections required to the thesis and the date by which these should be made at the end of the oral examination.
 - a. If not submitted with the RDC.4/4R form, the list of corrections must be sent to the Doctoral College, to be forwarded to the student, within 2 weeks of the *viva voce* examination.
 - b. Corrections are to be approved by the Internal Examiner (or Chair if there is no internal examiner, who may liaise with one or both external examiners in making their decision).
 - c. The student should be told by the examiners the form in which to submit the corrections; normally an electronic copy with the changes/corrections tracked, highlighted or tagged is preferred, with a cover sheet indicating where each correction can be found.
- 14.3. The corrections must be made and submitted to the Doctoral College to send to the Internal Examiner or Chair within one month of the formal notification of the outcome. If a student is unable to meet this deadline, they may request an extension.

- 14.4. Corrections are not an iterative process between the student and examiners and examiners are not expected to act as mentors or advisors during this process. If a student has any queries, they should ask their Director of Studies or other supervisor to liaise with the examiners on their behalf.
- 14.5. The Internal Examiner (or Chair) must complete a Corrections Report Form COR.3 and return it to the Doctoral College within 20 working days of receiving the corrections. If for any reason they are unable to consider these corrections and respond within 20 working days, the Doctoral College should be notified so the student may be informed of the delay.
- 14.6. If the corrections are approved, the degree will be awarded when the electronic copy of the final corrected thesis has been submitted to the University repository (PEARL), the submission been approved by the Doctoral College and any outstanding academic debts to the University have been paid.
- 14.7. If the corrections are not approved, then the outcome of the examination is a fail; the student will not receive an award and no re-examination is permitted. Please see Appendix B ('Flowchart of PGR Examination Outcomes'). The Internal Examiner (or Chair) must use form COR.3 to identify the ways in which the corrections were deficient. Please remember that examiners may not expect or require the student to make any corrections that were not on the List of Corrections sent to them by the Doctoral College with the formal notification of their examination outcome.

15. PhDs on the Basis of Prior Published Works

- 15.1. The *viva voce* examination for a thesis submitted for the award of PhD on the basis of Prior Published Works should be run as per process above, with the following exception: the examination outcome 8.4c (deferral – resubmission) is *not* available.
- 15.2. As the published works are already in the public domain, and cannot be revised following examination, examiners may only recommend Corrections that can be made to the Integrative Summary. Please see [the Regulations and Guidance Notes](#) for this award.

16. Appeals Against Academic Decisions

- 16.1. Details of the regulations on Appeals against academic decisions can be found at <https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/student-life/your-studies/essential-information/complaints-appeals-and-conduct>.

17. Questions and Concerns

- 17.1. Please email any questions about regulatory matters, operational or administrative processes to doctoralcollege@plymouth.ac.uk.
- 17.2. If you wish to discuss any matter related to the conduct of the examination or wish to ask for advice or guidance about your role as an examiner in confidence, please contact the [Director of the Doctoral College](#).

Appendix A: Remote Viva Tips

The following tips are for both examination teams and students, from those who have successfully participated in remote *vivas*:

1. Test and practise with the technology and platform in advance so you understand what it can and can't do. Don't wait until the last minute to sign in or join the meeting. If you are having tech issues, make sure you tell another participant by email/phone etc (preferably the Chair) so that everybody is aware.
2. Some people have recommended using an ethernet cable for a more stable connection (rather than Wifi).
3. Using headphones/headset may make it easier to hear conversations clearly.
4. Mute when you're not speaking to minimise background noise (especially if you are typing on a keyboard while listening).
5. Try to choose a quiet place where you will not be disturbed. Close the door to the room if possible. Make sure you have water available.
6. Take some time at the start of the *viva* to establish a rapport. Discuss issues that may go wrong due to the technology and how you plan to deal with it together.
7. Establish a mechanism for when somebody wants to speak or intervene, so that participants don't simply talk over each other. Try to leave time after a comment or question for a response without being tempted to 'fill up' silence.
8. Make sure everybody can see you clearly and that your head is fully in shot. Sit with your back to a wall rather than a window, if possible.
9. Set a plain background using Zoom, if you think your real life background might be distracting (or you don't want to share it).
10. Think about your body language and potential difficulties in picking up non-verbal cues. Try to look at the camera as much as possible.
11. Refer explicitly and clearly to page numbers (and figure headings, etc) in the thesis. Wait for everybody to look for these references and to catch up (remember that examiners will likely be looking for these on a pdf/screen).
12. Remote *vivas* often lend themselves to more of a 'question and answer' format. Examiners should try to engender discussion as much as possible.
13. The same common courtesies apply online as they would in person. Don't forget to greet and say goodbye as normal. Be patient and understanding when things go wrong.
14. You might also find the UK Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE) 'Conducting Vivas Online: A Guide for Institutions & Students' useful. It can be downloaded [here](#).

Flowchart of PGR Examination Outcomes

