



Edinburgh, Earth and Environment  
Doctoral Training Partnership

# **The Final Route to a PhD Award: Supervisor and Examiner Perspectives**



# Supervisor responsibilities

- agree a schedule for completion of the thesis
- read and comment on your drafts
- confirm that the thesis will be ready for submission
- suggest and contact internal and external examiners (two external examiners if the candidate is a member of University staff)
- pace nervously outside the examination room
- have champagne on ice
- email your research group to announce completion of the exam

# Internal examiner responsibilities

- arrange the oral exam
  - agree a date and time with the external examiner and the candidate (supervisor *can* be present in the exam with permission of the candidate – they may not comment during the exam or discuss with the examiners)
  - book a room
  - complete a Part I report independently of the external examiner
  - chair the oral exam
  - (first-time internal examiners will have a non-examining chair)
  - communicate the recommendations of the examiners to the candidate informally
- return paperwork to the College Office within 2 weeks after the oral exam
- receive and read an amended thesis with any requested corrections
- return Certification of Corrections form to the College Office (with agreement of external examiner, if requested)

# External examiner responsibilities

- read the thesis
- complete a Part I report independently of the internal examiner
- attend the oral exam
- complete a joint Part II report with the internal examiner, including
  - detailed comments on the scope and quality of the work
  - a recommendation to the College Board of Examiners
  - a “Critique for the student” (corrections)

# The oral exam (viva)

- will be held in Edinburgh, with the examiners and the candidate physically present (except under exceptional circumstances)
- no formal time limit, but usually lasts between 2 and 4 hours
- used to establish:
  - the candidate's knowledge of their field
  - the extent of any collaboration
  - that the thesis and the defence of it satisfy the requirements for a PhD
- should be a positive experience for the candidate!

# Possible recommendations

- award PhD without corrections
- minor corrections needed within 3 months
- additional oral examination needed within 4 months
- additional work on thesis required within a specified period, no oral re-examination
- substantial work on thesis and oral re-examination needed
- award MPhil
- award MPhil following minor corrections
- substantial work required before resubmission and oral exam for MPhil
- award MRes
- fail

# Requirements of a PhD thesis

- an original work making a significant contribution to knowledge in the field of study and containing material worthy of publication
- shows adequate knowledge of the field of study and relevant literature
- shows the exercise of critical judgement with regard to both the candidate's work and that of other scholars in the same general field
- contains material which presents a unified body of work such as could reasonably be achieved by research during the prescribed period of study
- satisfactory in its literary presentation
- gives full and adequate references
- has a coherent structure understandable to a scholar in the same general field with regard to intentions, background, methods and conclusions