

**INSIDER GUIDE
TO THE
DOCTORAL VIVA**

3 July 2019



Our focus
Demystifying the doctoral viva

- What happens between thesis hand-in and the viva?
- How examiners examine a doctoral thesis
- How to prepare for my doctoral viva
- What will happen on viva day
- What happens after the viva
- Experience from a recently completed Student



What happens between thesis hand-in and the viva?

Examiners receive your thesis

- read it
- submit their preliminary reports based on your written work to !RDC Admin (at least 7 days before the date of your viva)

!RDC Admin exchanges the reports

- these are discussed during the examiners' pre-meet on the day of your viva

FORM RF5D (2017/8)

**Sheffield
Hallam
University**

CONFIDENTIAL

RESEARCH DEGREES COMMITTEE

EXAMINER'S PRELIMINARY REPORT ON A CANDIDATE FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Please note: Under Data Protection legislation, although this examiner's report form is confidential to the University and the examiners, the candidate may request sight of it after the oral assessment, for example, to support an appeal against the recommendations of the examiners.

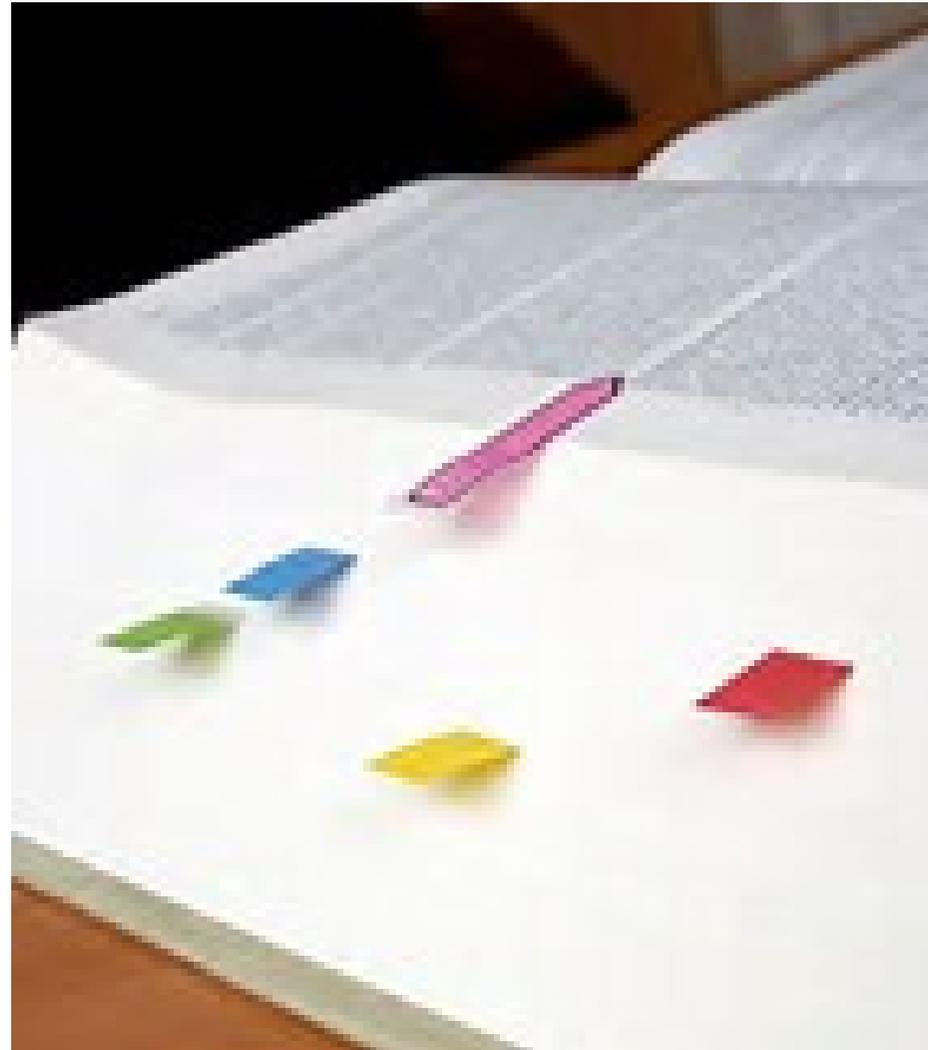
PART 1

1 REGISTRATION

Student ID:
Surname:
First Name(s):
Thesis Title:

What happens between thesis hand-in and the viva?

- **You** should be offered a mock viva
 - organised by your supervisory team
- **You** read through your thesis
- **You** re-visit talking through your thesis ideas to those not familiar with your work



Examining a PhD Thesis

Lisa Hopkins

Head of Graduate School, SSH

Pre-viva form

- Does the thesis represent an independent and original contribution to knowledge?
- For practice-based submissions, is the relationship between the theoretical and practical aspects satisfactorily articulated in the thesis (ie those consisting of a thesis and some form of accompanying creative output / artefact / scholarly work)?

Pre-viva form cont.

- Does the thesis include a critical evaluation of the relevant literature?
- Does the thesis demonstrate an understanding of research methods in the appropriate field?
- Is the thesis satisfactory as regards presentation and succinctness?
- Is the abstract an appropriately succinct synopsis of the thesis which states the nature and scope of the programme of research undertaken and the contribution made to knowledge of the subject?

What will happen on Viva Day?

Preparing for the viva: the 'mock' viva.

- The 'mock' or 'mini' viva can be a very useful way to prepare for your actual viva.
- These slides contain some suggestions you might find useful.
- There is also a handout that gives you some general ideas about the issues in a viva although the actual viva often takes its own course

**Presentation by Emeritus Professor John McAuley,
Sheffield Business School, Sheffield Hallam University**

Guidelines for the mock viva.

1. Identify what you and your supervisor want the particular mock viva to achieve and choose a style accordingly.
 2. Prepare thoroughly for the mock viva; the process of preparation is important for a constructive experience.
 3. The examiners should be well prepared (even if they have not read the thesis) and take the event seriously.
 4. You should receive feedback on the candidate's performance - about their ways of answering questions as well as the content of answers.
 5. Perhaps most important, do not think of a mock viva as a trial run for the real thing.
 6. Mock vivas are one part of a package of viva preparations.
 - Mock vivas have much to offer, but they are no replacement for long-term preparations.
- Adapted from Tinkler, P., Jackson, C. (2004) *The Doctoral Examination Process: A Handbook for Students, Examiners and Supervisors* Open University Press

Some good advice from Leicester University.

- You need to practise answering viva questions.
- A list of typical questions is provided on the handout and you can add to this yourself.
 - Make sure you include the difficult questions so that you have a chance to practise how you might answer them.
- Some form of mock or mini viva is essential, but there are various ways of conducting this: from the formal to the informal, from public to private, depending on what you would find most useful.
- The important thing is to answer out loud not just keeping your ideas in your thoughts.
 - This can be done in a formal setting with an audience of your supervisor or colleagues, but can also be done in private while walking round a garden or park, or in your room.
- In speaking aloud you force yourself to put your responses, clarifications, and deliberations into words.
 - Initially this can feel embarrassing, stressful, and difficult, but it is invaluable preparation for arguing your case coherently on the day.

Some good advice from a viva candidate based on feedback from her supervisors.

- Convey the main points of your thesis clearly and concisely. Don't waffle on and stray from answering the question.
- Your language impacts upon perceived confidence – avoid vagueness and saying words such as 'stuff' and ending sentences in 'I think'.
- Champion your research approach whether it is quantitative or qualitative
- It's OK if you can't answer a question
 - Prepare phrases that give you a get out e.g. "that was beyond the scope of the study".
 - It's also OK to ask for clarification e.g. "could you expand on what you mean".
- Be prepared to summarise and capture the essence of key aspects of your thesis so that when examiners refer you to a section, you have a condensed version of it available to discuss.
- You must own your thesis – it is your research
 - You need to believe in your research and defend what you have produced.
 - Be clear how it makes an original contribution to knowledge and or professional practice for a Professional Doctorate, and be clear of the ways that what you did met the research aims.
- Based on notes made by a viva candidate Don't mock the mock: The importance of having a practice viva [Jenna Condie](#) Jun.07, 2013 *This post was originally published on the socphd.com site [here](#).*

What happens after the viva?

Post-viva form

EXAMINERS' REPORT ON THE ORAL EXAMINATION

Are you satisfied that the thesis presented is the candidate's own work?

Did the candidate show a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of:

- (i) the programme of work
- (ii) the field of study in which the programme lies

Outcomes

A The candidate has satisfied the examiners as a candidate for the degree of PhD and the examiners recommend that:

either the candidate be granted the degree of PhD;
or the candidate be granted the degree of PhD subject to minor amendments and corrections being made to the thesis (**to be completed within 4 months of the oral examination**) to the satisfaction of the: *internal/external/internal and external examiner(s).

Or less happily

B The candidate has not satisfied the examiners as a candidate for the degree of PhD and the examiners recommend that the candidate be permitted to re-submit for the degree of PhD and be re-examined (**within 12 months of the oral examination**) as follows:

either the thesis must be revised and, if deemed satisfactory by the examiners, the candidate may be exempt from further examination, oral or otherwise;
or the thesis must be revised and the candidate must undergo a further oral or alternative examination;

Or sadly

- C The candidate has not satisfied the examiners as a candidate for the degree of PhD and the examiners recommend that the candidate be not granted the degree of PhD and be not permitted to be re-examined.
- D The candidate has not satisfied the examiners as a candidate for the degree of PhD, and the examiners recommend that the candidate be granted the degree of MPhil subject to the presentation of the thesis amended to the satisfaction of the examiners (if appropriate).

Conferment

- You will be sent a draft of your certificate
 - Please check that your name has been spelled correctly
- You will be sent details of the Graduation Ceremony
 - We enjoy congratulating you
- And then you will be sent a questionnaire about your experience
- Then you can celebrate!

So make sure to:

- Watch The Good Viva video
- Talk to recent viva survivors
- Cite your examiners' publications
- Ask for breaks, clarification of questions etc

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying a Blackboard LMS page. The browser's address bar shows the URL: https://shuspace.shu.ac.uk/webapps/blackboard/content/listContent.jsp?course_id=_211438_1&. The page title is "Examination Information - 00-Z-S0003-20090".

The page content is titled "Examination Information" and is organized into three sections, each with an attached file:

- University Generic Learning Outcomes (Doctorate)**
Attached Files: [Skills for doctorate \(generic learning outcomes\).doc](#) (25 KB)
These describe the skills that a typical student should possess and/or demonstrate at doctoral level.
- Examination Process and Viva for a Research Degree Candidate**
Attached Files: [Guidance for Research Students re VIVA \(updated 2017\).docx](#) (244.338 KB)
All research students are required to undertake a 2 task assessment in order to attain a research degree. This is the submission of a written thesis with appropriate word count (according to the regulation for that award) and a defence of this work in an oral examination (viva voce). The guidelines for preparing students for viva are attached for information.
- Guidance Notes for Research Degree Examinations**
Attached Files: [Guidance Notes for Research Degree Examinations \(PhD MPhil\).doc](#) (226 KB)

A vertical sidebar on the right side of the page contains the text "Bb Support (14)" with an upward-pointing arrow. The left sidebar contains a navigation menu for the "RESEARCH DEGREES SITE (00-Z-S0003-20090)" with the following items: Announcements, Admin/pastoral Support, Regulations & Procedures, RDC and Forms, Examination Information, Faculty Information, Induction Packs, Doctoral School, Doctoral Skills Training, and RDE Planner. The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows the system tray with the date and time: 11:47, 13/12/2017.

The Viva - recollections from a recently
completed Student

Ronak Janani

**Sheffield
Hallam
University**

<http://viva-survivors.com/>

 *@vivasurvivors*

Viva Survivors

A podcast about PhDs, the viva and life afterwards

**Sheffield
Hallam
University**

| Thank you for listening

Any questions?

