

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR ALL EXAMINERS

University of Oxford

Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences Division

Additional Notes of Guidance for D.Phil. and M.Sc. by Research Examiners in the Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences Division

The Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences Division should be grateful if examiners would observe the following additions to the standard instructions contained in the University's 'Memorandum for Examiners for D.Phil. or M.Sc. by Research'.

1. Presentation of reports

All reports should be typed and not hand written, and printed in a legible font size (e.g. Times New Roman 12 point).

2. Content

It should be noted that in the MPLS Division the D.Phil. and M.Sc. examiners reports are sent for approval to the Director of Graduate Studies of the relevant department or sub-department, and then to the Head of Division or his/her nominee for approval on behalf of the Divisional Board. The purpose of divisional scrutiny is not to question or overturn the academic judgment of the examiners, but primarily to confirm that the examiners have provided a sufficient justification for their recommendation, and to check if there are any points in the report which might indicate some concern about the department's provision of doctoral training which the Division should raise with the appropriate Director of Graduate Studies. This final approval step is essential for quality assurance purposes. The report should therefore provide sufficient information to enable both the relevant Director of Graduate Studies and the Head of Division's nominee to understand the basis for the examiners' recommendation. Reports that do not meet this requirement may be returned to the examiners for amplification, leading to inevitable delays in granting the candidate leave to supplicate.

As clearly stated in the University's Memorandum of Guidance for Examiners the report should be "as far as possible expressed in terms that are intelligible to those who are not specialists in the particular field of the thesis". It should thus be written in a style that would be accessible to academics in any of the MPLS Division's departments.

The Head of Division's nominee does not generally receive a copy of the abstract of the thesis at the same time as the examiners' report. The Division does not need to see the candidate's own evaluation and summary of his/her achievements (normally aimed at the specialists) but rather the examiners' evaluation of the work aimed at the non-specialist.

The report will not be considered to be sufficient if it only indicates the general area in which the research was conducted (e.g. “the candidate presented a thesis about the synthesis and characterization of fluorine-containing molecules”); rather the report should summarize the specific achievements of the candidate’s research presented in the thesis and explain how the results and conclusions make “*a significant and substantial contribution in the particular field of learning within which the subject of the thesis falls.*” If the work is of publishable quality, or if it is known to have already been published, then it is particularly helpful for this to be indicated in the report.

Examiners are also asked to note that, as well as giving an informative report on the subject matter and on the strength and weaknesses of the thesis, a statement about the candidate’s performance in the viva should also be included within their report. The date of the viva and an estimate of the duration of the viva should be included. A few lines written about the viva is generally adequate.

Please ensure that the recommendation on the outcome of the examination is noted as clearly as possible in the written joint report, as well as on the report form GSO.11. An example of such a statement is provided below:

“We are clear that the candidate’s thesis and performance in the viva meet the standard required for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy”.

The statement may be enlarged upon to clarify the examiners’ views, for example to indicate if the candidate’s thesis and performance in the viva exceeded the standard, as the examiners consider appropriate.

3. Length of Report

As stated above, the Division asks examiners to provide a reasonably full statement of the scope and content of the thesis and to highlight the most significant outcomes of the research. The Division recognizes that the appropriate length may vary according to the subject and quality of the thesis. It welcomes the writing of concise and clear reports, but it expects that these would typically be of the order of one page in length for the case where a positive recommendation is made, and any minor corrections are straightforward. In cases where there are significant minor corrections, or referral back for resubmission is recommended, it is likely that a longer report will be necessary (see section 5.)

4. Minor Corrections

Minor corrections should normally cover typographical errors, spelling mistakes, incomplete or inconsistent references or equations, and factual mistakes. They may also include limited reconsideration and reworking of some findings or data; filling in minor gaps; and limited rewriting of the introduction and/or conclusion to clarify the aims, scope or findings of the thesis. Such corrections should not affect the substance of an argument or a conclusion in the thesis, and they should not indicate a candidate’s lack of grasp of the regular procedures for presenting research in his or her subject, and the carrying out of minor corrections should not involve the student doing any new research/experimental work to be able make these changes. Examiners must provide a list of corrections to the

candidate within two weeks of the oral examination. The candidate is allowed three months to make these corrections. It normally only requires one examiner (usually the internal) to approve 'minor corrections'. The joint report must *not* be submitted to the Graduate Studies Office until the corrections have been satisfactorily completed and checked. The internal examiner should indicate on the report form with their initials or a tick that these have been completed, and should date the confirmation of completion of minor corrections. (This is now a requirement on the revised examiners' report form GSO.11). It would also be helpful if examiners included a statement at the end of their report to confirm that these have been made to their satisfaction.

5. Referral

Examiners are reminded that where corrections of a more significant nature are required, for example where the student is required to carry out new research/experimental work that might alter the arguments or conclusions, then it is necessary to refer the thesis back for re-examination. Such revisions should be reassessed by both examiners.

A formal statement of the deficiencies in the thesis should be attached to your report to the Division. *This statement should not be communicated directly to the candidate (or his/her supervisor).* The Division takes a considerable interest in the wording of the statements of deficiencies. On occasion it asks examiners to expand or clarify certain points before the statement is formally transmitted to the student with the Division's decision on his/her candidature. Difficulties can sometimes occur on resubmission, and if there is a dispute it is important for the Division to know exactly what corrections the examiners have requested. Moreover it is equally important for a new examiner to know what his/her predecessor required, in the event that the latter does not serve in this capacity for the resubmission, as inevitably happens from time to time.

HTM/MTC/TPS