



Humanities Viva Voce Process (2020)

(Drawn from the Higher Degrees Admin Structures and Process doc, Academic Regulations 2019 and the Humanities Postgraduate Assessment Policy)

VIVA VOCE

The Academic Regulations make provision for a viva voce in the case of both Master's dissertations and Doctoral theses, but in different circumstances. Faculties are intended to propose their own regulations to govern vivas.

DOCTORAL VIVA

Subsection 16.6.1 of the Academic Regulations pertains to assessment of doctoral degrees and states, in part: The Faculty Rules and Regulations, approved by Senate, however may determine that a Viva Voce may form part of the academic requirements for the qualification.

This Policy constitutes the Faculty's rules and regulations in this regard.

Humanities regulations:

At doctoral level a viva is **mandatory** in the Faculty of Humanities and is governed by the following rules.

1. When looking for assessors, the Supervisor/s (SV/s), or NAC if that is the normal procedure in a Dept., must inform the potential assessors that a viva is part of the process and that it will take place shortly after the submission deadline (assessors have 6 weeks to assess a thesis and the viva will likely take place in week 7 or 8). At the point of appointing the four assessors (3 + back-up 1), the faculty office must indicate to the assessors, in a standard letter, that they will be required to participate in a viva as part of the examination process.

2. The NAC is responsible for ensuring that the viva occurs, is procedurally correct, and completed in a timely manner (see point 4 below about Departmental involvement).
3. Skype, Zoom, etc. will typically be used within Departments where assessors, the student or supervisor are unable to attend in person and/or no budget to fly them in is available.
4. The NACs will contact the assessors, individually, at point of student submission to arrange a time, up to (but not later than) 1-2 weeks after receipt of all assessors' reports, for the viva. Dept. secretaries are responsible for the logistics of the viva (that is obtaining a venue for the viva and arranging Skype, Zoom requirements with IT). The NAC must be cc'd in on all plans.
5. Assessors will be required to submit independent preliminary written reports to the Faculty Officer who then submits these reports to the NAC **before** the viva. These reports must make a recommendation in terms of 16.6.9¹ in order to assist in cases of disagreement but this recommendation may be tentative and provisional. The assessors' (anonymised) narrative reports are to be made available to the candidate prior to the viva.
6. The NAC compiles their own summary of the assessors' reports (as is the norm) and meets with the assessors 30 minutes prior to the Viva where the NAC will outline common themes among the assessor reports (highlight salient positives and negatives) and agree with the assessors on the agenda for the viva.
7. Present (in person or via videoconferencing) at the viva will be:
 - a. The PhD candidate
 - b. The NAC who acts as chair
 - c. All assessors
 - d. The supervisor may or may not attend (it is optional). Should the supervisor be present, they are observers unless invited to offer a viewpoint or point of clarification. Under normal circumstances supervisors will be included in the viva. Exceptions might include cases where students submitted without the supervisors' approval (See

¹ 16.6.9 The following results may be recommended by the individual assessors for a doctoral thesis: Approval of the thesis. Provisional approval of the thesis with the understanding that the candidate has to make non-substantive corrections and improvements to the thesis to the satisfaction of the supervisor. Recommendation that substantial amendments be made to the thesis in the light of deficiencies identified in the assessor's narrative report in which case the revised version must be submitted to the particular assessor for reassessment. Rejection of the thesis in which case no reassessment is recommended or considered

13.5.²), where supervisors are incapacitated, and where students feel more comfortable not having their supervisors present. Such cases would be rare and exceptional.

e. If an assessor or the student is unable to attend the viva on the arranged date, due to exceptional circumstances, they must inform the Faculty Officer and NAC in writing within a reasonable timeframe and a new viva date, as close to the original date as possible, will be sought.

f. One additional observer may also attend the viva, but only with the permission of the SV and student to do so.

8. The viva consists of questions (a maximum of three per assessor) and discussions of any nature that the assessors deem appropriate to

a. Ascertain that the student is the author of the work,

b. Determine what the student meant or intended by any part of the work,

c. Determine whether the work is of an acceptable quality,

d. Give the student the opportunity to reply to any concerns, which, therefore, must be put to the student if they are to be relied upon as reasons to withhold the degree or recommend revisions,

e. Explore points of interest for their own sake, and

f. Offer guidance and advice to the student for further development of this work and/or of the student's career.

9. The Viva should generally not take longer than 60 minutes.

10. Students are permitted to bring any materials they wish with them to the viva, including but not limited to a copy of their thesis. However, they are not permitted to communicate with anyone outside the room by any means during the viva.

11. After the viva, the student and supervisor leave the room, and the NAC chairs a discussion on the merits of the candidate's work in light of the discussion. The NAC is responsible for producing a report for submission to the FHDC on this discussion, indicating:

² 13.5: Where a dispute arises between the supervisor(s) and student about the submission of the thesis for assessment, the student has the right to approach the HoD, Vice Dean and Executive Dean, in this order, with a written submission motivating why the thesis is considered ready to be assessed. The Executive Dean will make a decision in consultation with the HoD and FHDC. The decision of the Executive Dean is reported to the SHDC.

- a. Whether the assessors were able to agree on a joint recommendation in terms of 16.6.9, in which case,
 - i. what it was,
 - ii. The reasons for the recommendation, and
- b. Any other important points arising in the discussion.
- c. If the assessors were unable to arrive at a joint recommendation,
 - i. whether any assessor wished to adjust their provisional individual recommendation, and
 - ii. what the main points of disagreement were.
- d. At this point if any assessor wishes to update or change their report and is happy to indicate as such in the viva, they will update their assessor form, or may permit the NAC to do so on their behalf (as long as the assessor signs off on this) and may also submit an updated narrative report to the NAC (and the original Faculty Officer). The revised documents must be submitted within 7 days to the relevant Faculty Officer.

12. If a joint recommendation is arrived at, then there is no need for the FHDC to invoke any procedure to resolve an impasse as contemplated in 16.6.10 and the FHDC may proceed to recommend the degree to SHDC, provided that it is satisfied with the fairness of the process and the rationality of the outcome.

13. If no joint recommendation is arrived at, then in terms of 16.6.10³ and 16.6.11⁴ the FHDC may invoke one of the appropriate procedures to resolve the impasse.

14. The outcome of the assessment process is not settled until the SHDC has decided upon the recommendation it receives. Provided this is clearly indicated to the student, the assessors and/or NAC may at their individual discretion share the outcome of the viva process with the student and supervisor informally.

³ The University is not bound by the recommendation of individual assessors as the final assessment result lies solely within the power of the University, which exercises an academic judgement when determining final results.

⁴ 16.6.11 The FHDC may (but is not obliged to) invoke one or more of the following procedures to resolve an impasse in the results of a doctoral study (in accordance with the Senate Higher Degrees Policy and Higher Degrees Administration: Structures and Processes): (a) request additional information from the assessors and/or supervisors; or (b) appoint an additional assessor to assess the thesis in the hope that the resulting report will resolve the impasse; or (c) invite an external expert to advise the FHDC; or (d) identify an independent arbiter to consider all the documentation pertaining to the assessment process, including the individual assessor's reports and present a decision to the FHDC; (e) initiate a facilitation process to reach a joint recommendation between assessors as per the Higher Degrees Administration: Structures and Processes; (f) any other procedure it deems appropriate

15. It is not permitted to indicate to the student at the outset or during the viva whether the thesis is deemed worthy of a doctorate, although naturally qualitative assessments of the work (“very impressive”, “rather confusing”, etc.) and its component parts may and often will be offered.

MASTERS VIVA

At Master’s level a viva is **optional** in the Faculty of Humanities. In all other respects (besides the circumstances in which the viva is called for), the rules for holding a viva are identical for Master’s and Doctoral degrees.