



**L-Università
ta' Malta**

**Procedures for the Examination of the
Master of Philosophy (M.Phil.) and
Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) Degrees
in terms of the Doctor of Philosophy – Ph.D. – Degree Regulations, 2023**

DOCTORAL SCHOOL
2023

1. INTRODUCTION

This document has been produced by the Doctoral School and the Office of the Registrar to provide guidance to examiners of work submitted by students for the award of the M.Phil. and Ph.D. degrees of the University of Malta. It contains essential information on the procedures to be followed in the examination process, describes the resulting options open to examiners, and the roles and responsibilities of all concerned in the examination process. Any deviations from these procedures need to be justified.

Nothing in the content of these Procedures takes precedence over the [Doctor of Philosophy – Ph.D. – Regulations, 2023](#) which may be subject to amendment.

Terms/Acronyms Used	
BoE	Board of Examiners
DAC	Doctoral Academic Committee
eSIMS	electronic Students Information Management System
Faculty/ies	The University faculty/ies, institute, centre or school, as applicable
Faculty Board	The Board of a faculty, institute, centre or school, as applicable
FDC	Faculty/Institute/Centre/School Doctoral Committee
PHRR	Programme Human Resource Requirements
TAB	Transfer Assessment Board
Thesis	Refer to definition of thesis in Ph.D. Regulation 6(1). In the case of Ph.D. by Practice as Research, any reference to thesis in these Procedures shall be taken to mean a thesis as well as the presentation of practice and research, accompanied by relevant documentation of the process
UADB	University Assessment Disciplinary Board

Form Nos	Title of Forms
Form 01	Intention to submit Doctor of Philosophy Thesis for Examination Form
Form 02	Appointment of Doctor of Philosophy Degree Board of Examiners' Form
Form 03	Submission of Doctor of Philosophy Thesis for Examination Form
Form 04	Doctor of Philosophy Degree Examiner's Preliminary Report Form
Form 05	Doctor of Philosophy Degree Board of Examiners' Final Joint Report Form
Form 06	Confirmation of Minor/Major Changes to Doctor of Philosophy Thesis Form
Form 12	Thesis Embargo Request Form

2. RESPONSIBILITIES

2.1 The **Faculty Offices** are responsible for the following aspects of the examination process:

- Sending a reminder to students about the maximum period by when they are required to submit their work for the M.Phil. or Ph.D. degree three months before the period is due to elapse;
- Processing of the students' request to submit their work for examination on the [Intention to submit Doctor of Philosophy Thesis for Examination Form \[Form 01\]](#) and the Thesis Embargo Request Form [Form 12], if required;
- Assisting the FDC in checking that the students have completed successfully any required study-unit/s with an overall average mark of at least 60% and (for students who commenced their studies as from 1 February 2023) that they have pursued professional development activities for a total of around 100 hours (Ph.D. Regulation 31 refers);
- Assisting the FDC in checking that the students have submitted the self-assessment form and the full proposal form, if required, with regard to ethics review;
- Processing of [Appointment of Doctor of Philosophy Degree Board of Examiners Form \[Form 02\]](#) through the FDC and the Faculty Board and referring the recommendation for consideration of the DAC and Senate;
- Informing members of the BoE of their appointment by Senate and directing them to a copy of the Ph.D. Regulations and of these Procedures;
- Inputting the names of the members of the BoE on the PHRR task available on the eSIMS portal thus ensuring that the Chair and the internal examiners will have access to the VLE platform hosting the students' work uploaded for checking by the Turnitin plagiarism detection software; submitting to the Doctoral School a copy of the report from SIMS indicating that the names of the members of the BoE have been inputted;
- Receiving the students' work for examination, as well as the [Submission of Doctor of Philosophy Thesis for Examination Form \[Form 03\]](#), together with a signed declaration that it has been submitted through the Turnitin plagiarism detection software and resultant report; issuing a receipt for all documentation received;
- In liaison with the Chair of the BoE, dispatching the students' work, the [Doctor of Philosophy Degree Examiner's Preliminary Report Form \[Form 04\]](#), and instructions to the BoE;
- In liaison with the Chair of the BoE, making practical arrangements for the oral examination, including identifying a suitable date, informing the student, the Principal Supervisor and the internal and external examiners of the time and place of the oral examination, giving the student at least three weeks' notice in writing;
- Assisting the Chair of the BoE in gathering the reports from the individual examiners before the oral examination;
- Following the oral examination, assisting the Chair of the BoE in forwarding the preliminary reports together with the final joint report prepared by the Chair for consideration by the DAC and subsequently to Senate;
- Following consideration by DAC, informing the Faculty Board that the BoE's recommendation has been forwarded to Senate;

- Assisting the Chair in forwarding the final joint report of the BoE (including the list of changes) to students, if the thesis is not approved unconditionally;
- After Senate's decision to award the degree, preparing the result sheet for the Academic Registrar's signature;
- After Senate's decision, assisting the Chair in forwarding a copy of the [Doctor of Philosophy Degree Board of Examiners' Final Joint Report Form \[Form 05\]](#) to students.
- After Senate's decision, inserting a copy of the preliminary individual and final joint examiners' reports (including any list of changes) in the student's file;
- Requesting payment of the examination fees due to the external examiner and to the internal examiners (where applicable);
- Receiving and dispatching of copies of the approved thesis and any other documentation to the Faculty library and one electronic copy to the University Library.

2.2 **The Doctoral Academic Committee (DAC)** is responsible for the following aspects of the examination process:

- Considering the recommendation of Faculty Boards proposing the appointment of the BoE before submission to Senate;
- Considering the decisions of the BoEs before making a recommendation to Senate, ensuring that the provisions of the Ph.D. Regulations and of these Procedures have been adhered to;
- Informing Faculty Boards if DAC is not forwarding its recommendation to Senate, giving an indication of the issues which require review.

2.3 The **Doctoral School** and the **Office of the Registrar** are responsible for the following aspects of the examination process:

- Receiving and processing all documentation sent by Faculties for consideration by DAC;
- Providing support with all aspects of these Procedures;
- Preparing a letter to be signed by the Director of the Doctoral School and the Academic Registrar informing the student of Senate's decision regarding the award.

3. THE EXAMINATION PROCESS

3.1 The examination process set out here relates to the submission of the students' work, its preliminary assessment by the BoE, and the subsequent oral examination. The procedure to be followed is set out in the [flow chart of the procedure for the examination process](#) (Fig. I – reproduced to the end of this document).

3.2 The purpose of the examination process is to ascertain that the student has reached the standard required by the criteria for the award of the Ph.D. degree, namely that the work:

- (a) represents a significant contribution to knowledge in a particular field of study;
- (b) contains evidence of originality by the discovery of new facts, and/or the development of new theories and/or methods, and/or by the exercise of independent critical judgement and constitutes an addition to knowledge;
- (c) contains evidence of the ability of the student to relate the subject matter of the thesis to the existing body of knowledge;
- (d) contains evidence of the ability of the student to apply research methods appropriate to the subject;
- (e) has a satisfactory level of literary presentation;
- (f) contains evidence that it is of peer-reviewed publishable quality; and
- (g) complies with the provisions of the Ph.D. Regulations.

3.3 In addition to the criteria listed in paragraph 3.2 above, in the case of a Ph.D. degree based on the Practice as Research option, the purpose of the examination process is also to ascertain that students have reached the required standard according to the following criteria:

- (a) are able to contextualize and reflect upon their practice in relation to their chosen research issue, question, or problem, accompanied by relevant documentation of the process;
- (b) are able to analyse the practice and result, critically reflecting on the key research issue, question, or problem, chosen methodologies, the definition of processes, evaluation, and contextualisation of the work; and
- (c) their work contains an original and significant contribution to knowledge.

3.4 A thesis being considered for the award of the M.Phil. degree must demonstrate that it:

- (a) constitutes research of an advanced or an original nature;
- (b) contains evidence of the ability of the student to relate the subject matter of the thesis to the existing body of knowledge;
- (c) contains evidence of the ability of the student to apply research methods appropriate to the subject; and
- (d) has a satisfactory level of literary presentation.

4. BEFORE THE ORAL EXAMINATION

4.1 Submission of students' work and dispatch

4.1.1 Not less than three months before the intended date of submission of the students' work for examination, students shall signify their intention to the Faculty Office using

the [Intention to submit Doctor of Philosophy Thesis Form \[Form 01\]](#). This will allow the Faculty to start the process of appointing the BoE.

- 4.1.2 Students are required to formally submit an electronic copy of their work and/or any copies (as directed by the Faculty Office) to the Faculty Office by the deadline indicated. Besides copies of their work students are to submit:
- (a) the [Submission of Doctor of Philosophy Thesis for Examination Form \[Form 03\]](#) that comprises a signed statement (including a declaration of authenticity) and a signed declaration by the Principal Supervisor certifying that they are aware that the student is submitting the thesis for examination; and
 - (b) a copy of the receipt generated by the Turnitin plagiarism detection software and the resultant report.
- 4.1.3 It is the responsibility of the Faculty Office alone to receive the students' work and arrange onward dispatch to the examiners approved by Senate, after consultation with the Chair of the BoE. Students' work shall not be forwarded to the BoE before the members' appointment is approved by Senate.
- 4.1.4 Under no circumstance should an examiner accept to examine a thesis (either electronic or hard copy) sent to them directly by a student or by the student's supervisor or by a member of the supervisory team or by any third party. Only work sent formally and directly by the Faculty Office should be examined.
- 4.1.5 All examiners should be given from six to eight weeks to examine the work and prepare their preliminary reports. Although this is a guideline rather than a regulation, it is important to note that delays in the examination process can cause considerable inconvenience and stress to the student.

4.2 Appointment of the Board of Examiners

- 4.2.1 Work considered for the award of the Ph.D. degree shall be examined by a BoE appointed for the purpose by Senate, on the recommendation of the FDC, Faculty Board and the DAC. The BoE shall include a Chair, who shall act as convenor and who shall be a resident academic, a visiting external examiner, and two internal examiners who shall normally be resident academics. If not enough examiners can be sourced internally, two visiting external examiners and one internal examiner, who shall be a resident academic, shall be appointed. Where the student is currently involved in teaching and/or research at the University or at the Junior College, whenever practicable, the internal examiners, who shall normally be resident academics, shall be appointed from different faculties or departments than those where the student teaches.

- 4.2.2 These considered for the award of the M.Phil. degree shall be examined by a BoE appointed for the purpose by Senate, on the recommendation of the Faculty Board and the DAC. The BoE shall include a Chair, who shall act as convenor and who shall be a resident academic, a visiting external examiner, and two internal examiners, who shall normally be resident academics. Where the student is currently involved in teaching and/or research at the University or at the Junior College, whenever practicable, the internal examiners, who shall normally be resident academics, shall be appointed from different faculties or departments than those where the student teaches.
- 4.2.3 Heads of Department/Directors are responsible for nominating suitable examiners using the [Appointment of Doctor of Philosophy Degree Examiners' Form \[Form 02\]](#). If the Head of Department or the Director is a member of the supervisory team, this role should be delegated to a senior academic member in the Department, Institute, Centre, or School who is familiar with the doctoral examination process.
- 4.2.4 Heads of Department/Directors, or their delegate, should consult the Principal Supervisor in nominating suitable examiners with appropriate subject expertise and experience. They should also informally approach the external examiner/s in advance to ask whether they are willing to act as examiner. This task should not be delegated to administrative staff. Following this informal approach, the Heads of Department/Directors must ensure that the [Appointment of Doctor of Philosophy Degree Board of Examiners' Form \[Form 02\]](#) is duly completed and sent to the FDC for its consideration and recommendation to the Faculty Board. Approval is also to be sought from the Visiting Lecturers and External Examiners Committee (VLEEC) for funds to cover costs relating to honoraria, travel arrangements and the stay of external examiners (as detailed in the Standard Operating Procedures for Visiting Lecturers and External Examiners). In recommending the nomination of visiting external examiners, Faculties need to be mindful of associated travel costs.
- 4.2.5 It is not the responsibility of students to nominate their own examiners and students do not have the right to request and have appointed examiners of their choosing. However, it is usual for the Principal Supervisor to discuss possible examiners with their student, in particular to establish whether there is any connection between the student and the examiner/s and to relay this information to the Head of Department/Director when consulted.
- 4.2.6 Academics who are approached to be nominated examiners must declare any known conflict of interest in line with the requirements of the [University's Consanguinity/Affinity/Dual Relationship Policy in relation to Examiners/Supervisors and Students](#). This includes, but is not limited to: current or former academic supervision, pastoral relationships, family relationships, friendship, employment or professional connections. The examiners should also declare any relationships with members of the supervisory team that might constitute a conflict of interest. It is not possible to specify all instances where close connections will prevent a potential examiner from being

considered as independent. Nominations may be rejected for the following reasons (but are not limited to them alone):

- (a) an examiner also being a member of the student's supervisory team or an advisor;
- (b) an external examiner who had been involved in the student's transfer to the Ph.D. decision;
- (c) a student who was holding a job offer from the same academic department as any of the nominated examiners;
- (d) an external examiner affiliated with the department where the student is registered; and
- (e) an external examiner who co-authored a paper with the student or with any member of the supervisory team.

Connections may exist but are not strong enough to bar an examiner from acting. These may include (but are not limited to):

- (a) the student has met the examiner at a conference where they spoke briefly about the thesis;
- (b) an internal examiner was based in the same Department or Institute, Centre, School as the student/supervisors;
- (c) the Chair and any examiner had supervised a member of the student's supervisory team, but more than five years previously;
- (d) a member of the student's supervisory team had supervised the Chair or an examiner, but more than five years previously;
- (e) the Chair or the external examiner had co-authored a publication with a member of the supervisory team, but the publication had been written more than five years previously; and
- (f) the Chair, the examiners and the supervisors were known to each other as experts within the field.

4.2.7 The BoE members are required to be familiar with the doctoral examination process, including having previous experience of conducting doctoral examinations. However, it is accepted that an academic has to examine a doctoral level thesis for the first time. If such a person is nominated as an internal examiner, she or he should be paired with an experienced examiner. The Head of Department/Director, or delegate, will be asked to confirm the amount of prior examining experience at doctoral level each examiner has on the [Appointment of Doctor of Philosophy Degree Board of Examiners' Form \[Form 02\]](#).

4.2.8 FDCs shall consider all nominations of examiners and may request further information on an examiner's suitability or experience prior to recommending the nomination for approval through the Faculty Board. Incomplete forms will be returned to the Head of Department/Director, or delegate, which may cause delays to the examination process.

4.2.9 It is Senate, through the DAC, that will approve all nominations of BoEs. The Faculty Office will formally inform the examiners of their appointment and direct them to a copy of the Ph.D. Regulations and to these Procedures. A copy of this letter will be sent to the Principal Supervisor who shall inform the student that the BoE has been appointed. The Chair, with the assistance of the Faculty Manager/Officer, will then forward a copy of the student's work to all the examiners.

4.3 The Examiners

4.3.1 The competence and independence of examiners is of fundamental importance to the integrity of the assessment process and in maintaining the academic standards of the University's research degrees. The examiners are jointly responsible for ensuring that the requirements for the examination process as laid out in the Ph.D. Regulations and in these Procedures are adhered to.

4.3.2 The student, the student's supervisor or supervisory team, and the examiners should avoid any situation in the period leading up to the examination that might impair the ability of the examiners to make an impartial and unhindered assessment of the student's work. Examiners are expected to treat the student's work with strict confidence.

4.3.3 None of the examiners should be asked to comment on drafts of the student's work prior to the examination. Previous participation in a TAB does not preclude a resident academic from qualifying as an internal examiner. Examiners may give the student an indication of the recommendation that they will make to Senate after the oral examination has been completed but they should ensure that the student understands that the recommendation is subject to approval by Senate.

4.3.4 Students must not contact the examiners for any reason, and may contact the Chair of the BoE with regard to their examination only to discuss the practical arrangements.

4.3.5 Supervisors or members of the supervisory team must not contact the examiners on any matter relating to the examination, and may contact the Chair of the BoE only in respect of any practical arrangements.

4.3.6 ***Chair of the Board of Examiners.*** The Chair shall read the thesis but is not expected to examine it or to submit a preliminary report. The Chair must be a resident academic member of staff of the University and have a thorough understanding of the Ph.D. Regulations and of these Procedures. The Chair must also have experience of doctoral oral examinations as an examiner. In addition, the Chair liaises with the Faculty Manager/Officer and makes the following arrangements/takes the following action as the examination convenor:

- (a) indicating a timetable, including for submission of the preliminary reports, a tentative date for the oral examination, with an understanding that this date would be confirmed or otherwise nearer the time;
- (b) reviewing the 'originality' report generated by the Turnitin plagiarism detection software and informing the Faculty Manager/Officer if the student's work has passed the check so that the student's work may be forwarded to the other members of the BoE;
- (c) ensuring the timely dispatch of copies of the thesis to the Chair and to all examiners by the Faculty Office;
- (d) drafting a report for the UADB if evidence of plagiarism or any other academic misdemeanour have been identified at any stage of the examination process;
- (e) receiving and circulating the preliminary reports from all examiners and presiding over the discussions concerning issues raised in the preliminary examiners' reports and the plan for conducting the oral examination;
- (f) chairing the oral examination and subsequent deliberations of the examiners leading to their conclusions and recommendations;
- (g) drafting the final joint examiners' report after the oral examination;
- (h) compiling, in conjunction with the examiners, the itemised list of changes at the required detail and ensuring that list is forwarded for the consideration of the DAC within one week of the oral examination and, following the DAC's approval, to the student;
- (i) ensuring that changes to the thesis, whether minor or major (in conjunction with the other members of the BoE) (see sections 6.2 or 6.3), have been completed;
- (j) ensuring that the examiners' preliminary reports and final joint report are submitted for the consideration of Senate through the DAC; and
- (k) ensuring that the examination process is conducted in a fair and impartial manner.

4.3.7 **External examiner/s.** The main function of the external examiner is to assure that the academic standards of the research degrees awarded by the University are rigorous, as well as comparable with those at similar institutions of higher learning. The external examiner should command authority in the area of research being examined and must be external to the University, from an overseas institution (university or research entity) of international repute. In cases where a second external examiner is nominated, the external examiners should not be affiliated with the same institution.

4.3.8 **Internal examiner/s.** The internal examiners must normally be resident academics of the University, experienced in research in the general area of the student's thesis and where practicable, shall be specialists in the topic to be examined. The internal examiners must have a thorough understanding of the Ph.D. Regulations and of these Procedures. Where the student is currently involved in teaching and/or research at the University or at the Junior College, whenever practicable, the internal examiners shall be appointed from different faculties or departments than those where the student teaches.

4.3.9 **Observer.** The student's Principal Supervisor, Co-supervisor or Advisers may not be examiners. Only the student's Principal Supervisor may attend the oral examination as an observer. The Principal Supervisor shall not have access to the examiners' reports before the oral examination and is required to withdraw before the examiners begin to deliberate and consider their decision. The Principal Supervisor may not contribute to discussion during the oral examination unless specifically invited to do so by the examiners and should enter and leave the room with the student. The oral examination can proceed if the Principal Supervisor is inadvertently absent and a note to that effect is included in the examiners' final joint report.

4.4 Use of Unfair Means

4.4.1 The University requires students to submit their work through the Turnitin plagiarism detection software to ensure that cheating and unfair means have not been used. This applies to both first submissions and resubmissions. It is the responsibility of the Chair of the BoE to review the Turnitin 'originality' report and to advise the Faculty Manager/Officer if the student's work has passed the check, so that it can be dispatched to the examiners as soon as possible.

4.5 Examiners' preliminary reports and discussions prior to the oral examination

4.5.1 The thesis should be assessed by the examiners who are each required to prepare a preliminary report, in all cases written in English, using the [Doctor of Philosophy Degree Examiner's Preliminary Report Form \[Form 04\]](#) which will be provided by the Faculty Office when the thesis is sent for examination.

4.5.2 The examiners' judgement of the thesis should be based on what may reasonably be expected of a diligent and capable student after completion of the prescribed period of research at doctoral level and with due regard to the University's criteria for the award of the degree (see paragraph 6.1.1 below).

4.5.3 The preliminary reports should be prepared after the examiners read the work submitted by the student. The Chair of the BoE shall circulate each preliminary report to the examiners and shall call a meeting of the examiners to discuss the preliminary reports received and decide on the next stage of the examination process. The BoE shall admit the student to the oral examination either:

- (a) for consideration for the award of the Ph.D. degree, with the understanding that minor or major changes or re-submission may be required after the oral examination; or
- (b) for consideration for the award of the M.Phil. degree with the understanding that minor or major changes may be required after the oral examination; or
- (c) even if the thesis falls below the standard required of an M.Phil. degree.

- 4.5.4 Examiners should send their preliminary report to the Chair of the BoE without unnecessary delay, normally within six to eight weeks from receiving the thesis.
- 4.5.5 Preliminary examiners' reports are also required in the case of re-examination and must be submitted with the final joint examiners' report as well as the original preliminary reports and final joint examiners' report to the DAC.
- 4.5.6 If the BoE discovers what appears to be *prima facie* a case of plagiarism or any other academic misdemeanour in the submitted thesis, it shall stop the process of examination forthwith and report the alleged breach of the regulations to the Secretary of the UADB. A copy of the Turnitin plagiarism detection software report together with supporting documentation which purports to prove the alleged plagiarism or other academic misdemeanour shall be provided to the UADB. The assessment of the thesis can resume if the final decision of the UADB allows it and subject to any disciplinary penalties as may be imposed.

5. THE ORAL EXAMINATION

5.1 Arranging the oral examination

- 5.1.1 The examiners are required to jointly test, by oral examination, the student. The oral examination should enable the examiners to:
 - (a) question the student on the substance and method of the work submitted, as well as the significant contribution to knowledge in the particular field of study;
 - (b) assess the ability of the student to present and defend intellectual arguments;
 - (c) assess the student's knowledge and understanding of the discipline and of the relevant literature; and
 - (d) verify that the work submitted by the student is the student's own and assess the extent of any collaboration.
- 5.1.2 In the case of Ph.D. by Practice as Research, the submission of both the practical and the written components shall be the subject of the oral examination.
- 5.1.3 Arrangements for the oral examination are made by the Chair of the BoE. The Chair, in liaison with the Faculty Manager/Officer, is responsible for all communications with the other examiners and for notifying the student of the date and the venue of the oral examination at least three weeks in advance. Students should be strongly advised to have their thesis readily available to them for consultation during the examination.
- 5.1.4 The oral examination should be held at the University of Malta, unless a different location is specified in the case of a Ph.D. collaborative programme. A suitable venue should be identified and the examination session should not begin earlier than 09:00

nor be concluded later than 18:00. An oral examination shall normally extend over a minimum of one hour and a maximum of three hours, with appropriate breaks.

- 5.1.5 The oral examination shall normally be conducted in English, except in cases where the work was written in another language, or where there is formal approved agreement that requires the discussion to be conducted in another language.

5.2 The oral examination

- 5.2.1 The oral examination is an integral part of the examination process, with the specific purposes set out in paragraph 3.2 above. Care should be taken to avoid giving the impression at any time that the oral examination and the subsequent consideration of the examiners' reports and their joint decision are in any sense mere formalities.
- 5.2.2 Examiners should seek to encourage students to feel at ease during the oral examination so that they can display their knowledge and abilities to best effect. The strengths, weaknesses and limitations of the thesis should be acknowledged and explored. At an early stage in the proceedings, students should be given an opportunity to explain precisely what their thesis is intended to achieve and wherein they see its significance as a contribution to knowledge. If there appears to be a major discrepancy between the student's aims and the content of the actual thesis, the reasons for the mismatch should be explored. Students should also be given the opportunity to explain any apparent failure to use important sources, whether primary or secondary, or neglect of relevant approaches or methodologies.
- 5.2.3 Examiners should not pre-judge the outcome of the oral examination and must not under any circumstances advise the student of their expectation of the outcome before the examination has been completed. This is particularly important where examiners feel the thesis is poor. Where a thesis reveals significant deficiencies, a representative sample of these should be drawn to the student's attention, and specific time for explanation and defence should be allowed for within the oral examination.
- 5.2.4 If the BoE discerns serious dissonance between the quality and content of the thesis and the performance of the student during the oral examination, it shall endeavour to establish whether the work is truly the student's own. If the BoE is of the opinion that a breach of the University Assessment Regulations may have occurred, it shall submit a report in writing to the Secretary of the UADB indicating instances of plagiarism or any other academic misdemeanour. When the UADB informs the BoE of its final decision, the examination process can resume, subject to any disciplinary penalties as may be imposed, unless the UADB decides that the student is in breach of the regulations and recommends that the degree be not awarded. The student has the right to appeal the UADB's decision in terms of the [University Assessment Regulations, 2009](#).

5.3 After the oral examination

5.3.1 After the oral examination, the examiners will produce a final joint report written in English and make an agreed recommendation on the award of the degree (see paragraph 6.1 below). The Chair of the BoE is responsible for ensuring that the [Doctor of Philosophy Degree Examiner's Preliminary Report Form \[Form 04\]](#) and the [Doctor of Philosophy Degree Board of Examiners' Final Joint Report Form \[Form 05\]](#) are completed, signed and submitted to the DAC within two weeks following the oral examination. In case of disagreement amongst the members of the BoE, the procedures as described in the [University Assessment Regulations, 2009](#) shall apply.

6. REPORTING ON THE EXAMINATION

6.1 Joint Recommendation of the BoE to Senate

6.1.1 The various recommendations provided for in the Ph.D. Regulations are set out on the [Doctor of Philosophy Degree Board of Examiners' Final Joint Report Form \[Form 05\]](#) and examiners are to tick the section which applies. The decisions available to the examiners and which may be recommended to Senate are the following:

	BoE DECISIONS	DEGREE
1.	That the degree be awarded without the need for any changes to the thesis and/or practice. This option is chosen where the examiners are fully satisfied that the work submitted and the performance of the student at the oral examination are worthy of a clear recommendation for the award of the Ph.D. degree, without any reservations, further changes or examination.	Award Ph.D.
2.	That the degree be awarded once specified minor changes have been completed to the satisfaction of the Chair of the BoE. The Chair shall collate a single conjoint list of changes and relay it to the student for guidance and action. The student shall be required to submit the revised thesis within three months of the written official notification sent by the Chair, and include a report explaining how all the requested changes have been addressed. A recommendation to Senate that the student be awarded the Ph.D. degree shall be made after the Chair confirms in writing that the minor	Award Ph.D.

	amendments have been carried out satisfactorily. Minor changes are allowed once only.	
3.	<p>That the degree be awarded once specified major changes have been completed to the satisfaction of the BoE.</p> <p>The Chair shall collate a single conjoint list of changes and relay it to the student for guidance and action. The student shall be required to submit the revised thesis within a minimum of six months and a maximum of 12 months following the written official notification sent by the Chair, and include a report explaining how all the requested changes have been addressed. A recommendation to Senate that the student be awarded the Ph.D. degree shall be made after all members of the BoE confirm in writing that the major changes have been carried out to their satisfaction. Major changes are allowed once only.</p>	Award Ph.D.
4	<p>That the degree be not awarded, but that the student be allowed to be re-examined on a revised thesis after such modification of form or content as the examiners may prescribe, with a second oral examination.</p> <p>This option may be chosen where the examiners do not feel able to make a recommendation for the award of the Ph.D. degree at this time. The thesis is referred back as it requires substantial changes in order to meet the requirements of the Ph.D. degree, but the examiners feel that the student is capable of re-submitting the thesis, to their satisfaction, within a period of a minimum of 12 and a maximum of 18 months.</p> <p>Students are required to formally submit a revised thesis, following the instructions relayed to them in writing by the Chair, within the period specified.</p> <p>The same examiners will normally re-examine the thesis, produce a preliminary report, take part in the oral examination, and draw up a final joint report.</p> <p>A recommendation to Senate that the student be awarded the Ph.D. degree shall be made after all members of the BoE confirm in writing that the required changes have been carried out to their satisfaction.</p> <p>Re-submission of a thesis is allowed once only.</p>	Re-submission & second oral examination
5.	<p>That the degree be not awarded, but that the M.Phil. degree be awarded (subject only to the necessary changes to the cover and title page of the thesis).</p> <p>The examiners must be in agreement that the thesis does not meet the required standard for the award of the Ph.D. degree, even with time allowed for major changes to be</p>	Award M.Phil.

	made or re-submission. The examiners must be completely satisfied that the thesis meets the criteria for the award of an M.Phil. degree without further modification other than changes to the title pages of the thesis. Examiners must provide a detailed justification for making this decision.	
6.	<p>That the degree be not awarded, but that the M.Phil. degree be awarded once specified minor changes have been completed satisfactorily.</p> <p>The Chair shall collate a single conjoint list of changes and relay it to the student for guidance and action. The student shall be required to submit the revised thesis within three months of the written official notification sent by the Chair, and include a report explaining how all the requested changes have been addressed. A recommendation to Senate that the student be awarded the M.Phil. degree shall be made after the minor changes have been carried out to the satisfaction of the Chair of the BoE. Such minor changes shall be allowed once only.</p>	Award M.Phil.
7.	<p>That no degree be awarded.</p> <p>This option may be chosen where the examiners are in agreement that the thesis does not meet the required standard for the award of the Ph.D. degree or of the M.Phil. degree, nor it is likely to meet those standards even given time for substantial revisions to be made. This recommendation is therefore for an outright fail and no further submissions will be accepted.</p> <p>This option is also open to the examiners in cases of unauthorised absence of the student from the oral examination. In this case, Senate may request that a second oral examination be arranged if extenuating circumstances are subsequently revealed that could not reasonably have been presented at the time of the oral examination.</p>	No degree awarded

6.1.2 The [Doctor of Philosophy Degree Board of Examiners' Final Joint Report Form \[Form 05\]](#) after the oral examination sets out their assessment of the student and the submitted work and makes a firm recommendation on the award, with appropriate justification, to Senate. Where the final joint report differs in its findings from any of the preliminary reports, examiners should justify the changes in their final joint report. Examiners should bear in mind that a copy of the final joint report will be sent to students after being considered by Senate.

6.1.3 The [Doctor of Philosophy Degree Examiner's Preliminary Report Form \[Form 04\]](#) and the [Doctor of Philosophy Degree Board of Examiners' Final Joint Report Form \[Form 05\]](#)

should be used to assist examiners in providing a structured decision regarding the award of the Ph.D. degree. Examiners should comment on the strengths, any weaknesses, and limitations of the student's work and their performance in the oral examination. Reports need to be detailed, comprehensive and specific to the student and his/her submitted work. Generic reports will not be accepted.

- 6.1.4 When the decision of the BoE is for the award of the Ph.D. degree, the Chair shall inform the student of their joint decision but should ensure that the student understands that the recommendation may not be accepted by Senate. Examiners and students must be aware that no award will be made, or deadlines for any changes formally agreed, until the DAC has considered the reports. The Chair will provide students with an itemised list of changes as soon as possible after the DAC considers the examiners' reports so that the student may begin the revisions.
- 6.1.5 The DAC shall view all the reports prepared by BoEs, including the preliminary reports and the final joint report to ascertain that all the regulations and procedures related to the examination of theses for the award of the Ph.D. or M.Phil. degrees have been adhered to. If all the documents are in order and changes to the thesis are required, the DAC will inform the Chair of the BoE to advise the student of any changes required, including re-submission if applicable. When any required changes are submitted to the satisfaction of the Chair or the BoE, as applicable, the final recommendation of the BoE shall be relayed to Senate through the DAC. Simultaneously, the Faculty Board shall be informed that a recommendation has been made to Senate.
- 6.1.6 It is possible for examiners to disagree to a greater or lesser extent in their evaluation of a student's work. It is desirable for the examiners to confer before a course of action described in paragraph 4.5.3 is agreed upon and, if significant divergences of opinion are identified, to resolve the matter on the basis of detailed argument about the specific academic points and devise a strategy to resolve these differences by agreed means and by careful structuring of the oral examination. All efforts must be made by examiners to reconcile their views and produce an agreed final joint report and recommendation. If that proves impossible, and consensus cannot be reached on the course of action described in paragraph 4.5.3, the Chair shall report the matter to the Dean or Director (or a senior academic member if the Dean/Director is a supervisor) who shall attempt to resolve the matter by mediation. If no consensual agreement can be reached, a decision shall be taken by a majority vote and be so recorded in the final joint report, provided that any dissenting member may submit a minority report giving reasons for the disagreement. The Academic Registrar shall bring minority reports to the attention of the Rector who shall either accept the majority decision or refer the matter for the consideration of Senate. If an external examiner has submitted a minority report, the matter shall always be referred to Senate. Senate shall either accept the majority report, or appoint an additional examiner or examiners, or a new BoE to resolve the matter.

6.2 Minor changes

6.2.1 These are changes that, although possibly extensive, will not result in changes to the claims that students make about their contribution or familiarity with knowledge.

6.2.2 Students required to make minor changes to their work will be granted three months to complete them. The period starts from the date on which they are provided with an itemised list of changes by the Chair of the BoE. Examples of minor changes include, but are not limited to, the following:

- correction of typographical and/or grammatical errors;
- improvement in the readability/accessibility of the information and knowledge contained in the thesis;
- improvement in a minor way to the logical argument.

6.2.3 Once Chairs of BoEs check and confirm that the changes have been undertaken, the Chair must sign and date the [Confirmation of Minor/Major Changes to the Ph.D. Thesis Form \[Form 06\]](#) and return it to the Doctoral School for consideration by the DAC. As a general guideline, the Chair should aim to complete their checking of the changes within up to three weeks of receiving the revised thesis and forward the [Confirmation of Minor/Major Changes to Doctor of Philosophy Thesis Form \[Form 06\]](#) forthwith.

6.3 Major changes

6.3.1 These are changes that are likely to result in a change to the claims that students make about their contributions, or their conclusions.

6.3.2 Students required to make major changes to their thesis will be granted between six and 12 months to complete them. The period starts from the date on which they are provided with the itemised list of changes by the Chair of the BoE. Examples of major changes include, but are not limited to the following:

- significant changes to the methodology and/or evaluation processes, that either render invalid some but not all of the claims made by the student, or that are required to support the claims made;
- grammatical and/or typographical errors that are so frequent that they may impede the examiners' ability to understand the thesis;
- re-writing of substantial parts of, or complete, chapters;
- restructuring the thesis, as long as the changes do not affect the validity of the claims made, and conclusions drawn by the student;
- adding to the discussion of relevant literature;
- improving in a major way the logical argument.

6.3.3 Once the major changes have been checked by the BoE, the members must sign and date the [Confirmation of Minor/Major Changes Form \[Form 06\]](#) and return it to the Doctoral School. As a general guideline, the BoE should aim to complete their checking of the changes within six weeks of receiving the revised thesis and forward the [Confirmation of Minor/Major Changes Form \[Form 06\]](#) forthwith.

6.4 Re-submission of Students' Work and Re-examination

6.4.1 Students shall be granted a period of between 12 and 18 months to re-submit their work and be re-examined. Students are required to follow the submission procedures in the same way as for the work submitted originally.

6.4.2 Following receipt of the re-submitted work, the examiners should review it in the same way as they did the version of the thesis submitted originally. Each examiner should prepare another preliminary report on the work.

6.4.3 A second oral examination shall be held in all cases to allow the student the opportunity to defend the work before a final decision is made. This should normally take place within 6 to 8 weeks from receipt of the thesis by the examiners. The external examiner need not be present for the oral examination physically but should participate in the oral examination through remote means.

6.4.4 After the oral examination, the [Doctor of Philosophy Degree Examiners' Final Joint Report Form \[Form 05\]](#) should be completed, signed and returned to the Doctoral School, along with each examiner's [Doctor of Philosophy Degree Examiner's Preliminary Report Form \[Form 04\]](#), within two weeks of the oral examination.

7. ACADEMIC APPEALS

7.1 Students may lodge an appeal with the Doctoral Appeal Review Board against decisions taken by BoEs within 15 working days of being notified of Senate's decision.

7.2 The academic judgement of the BoE is not reviewable by the Doctoral Appeal Review Board and a recommendation to alter the decision of the BoE can only be made if the change can be justified by objective criteria.

7.3 Appeals shall only be allowed if the student provides evidence that there was an administrative, procedural or clerical error in the examination of the thesis.

8. AWARD AND CONFERMENT OF DEGREE

8.1 Once the examiners have recommended the award of a degree to Senate, there are checks that need to be completed before a letter regarding the award can be sent to the

student by the Academic Registrar and the Director of the Doctoral School, copied to the Faculty Office, namely that:

- (a) the student does not have outstanding debts; and
- (b) an electronic copy of the thesis has been received by the University Library.

- 8.2 After Senate has approved the award of the Ph.D. or M.Phil. degree, the Faculty Office will register the student on the thesis in SIMS and insert the result. The Academic Registrar will sign the official result sheet and the result is published through eSIMS, with the student receiving a notification of the result by email.
- 8.3 The Admissions and Records Office will contact graduands regarding arrangements for the formal conferment of the degree at the appropriate time.

9. EXAMINERS' FEES AND EXPENSES

- 9.1 Once the award has been confirmed by Senate, Faculty Office staff should liaise with external examiners and complete the External Examiners Reimbursements Form, which should be submitted to the Finance Office for processing without delay. In the case of 'internal' local examiners who are not resident academics at the University, the Faculty Office staff should send a request for payment to the Finance Office without delay.

University of Malta – PhD examination process

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