



Preparing for your Viva

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- What's the point?
- What's the process?
- Go prepared
- What will you be asked?
- How should you answer?
- The outcome and what's next?



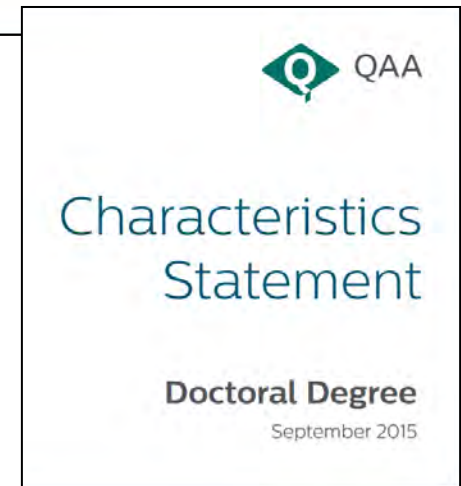
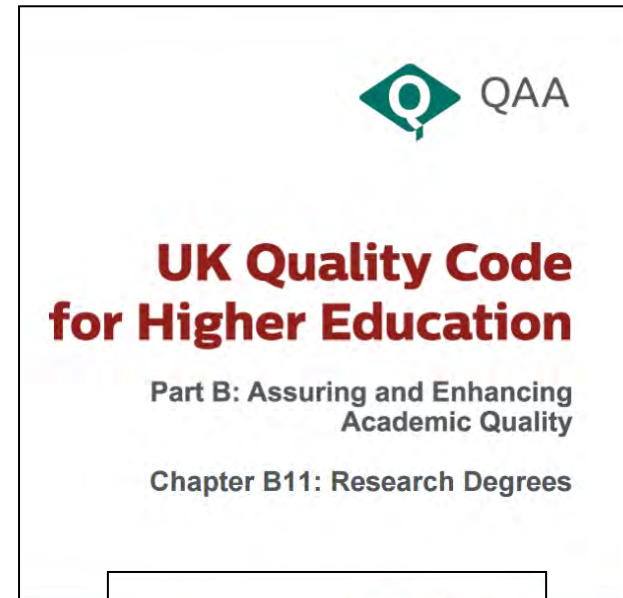
Research Degree Regulations:

The award of the **Research Masters** demonstrates a **systematic understanding of knowledge and a critical awareness of current problems and/or application of original thought, much of which is at or informed by the forefront** of the field of study or area of professional practice.

- Masters by Research; MPhil
- Usually up to 2 years full-time

The award of the **Doctoral Degree** demonstrates the main focus of the candidate's work to be their **contribution to knowledge in their discipline or field, through original research, or the original application of existing knowledge or understanding.**

- PhD or DPhil
- Professional and practice-based doctorates
- PhD by publication
- Usually up to 4 years full-time



Regulations for Research Degrees

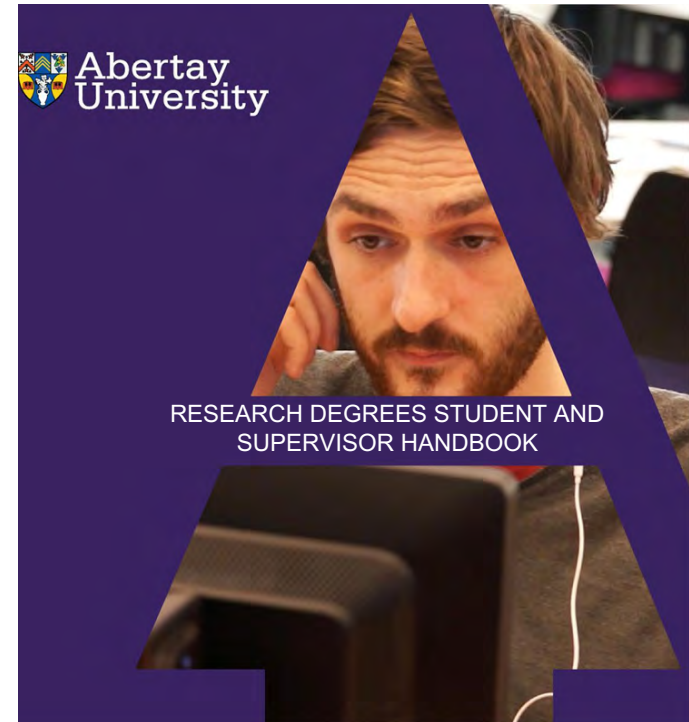
Research Degrees Student and Supervisor Handbook(s)

- **Check the Regulations for research degree programmes for your institution**

The regulations are the most important part of the University's information for research students. They set out requirements and expectations for the University's research degrees.

- Award titles etc
 - Maximum period of registration
 - *Viva* procedures
 - Corrections
- **Check any process details within your Research Degrees Student Handbook**

Specific process information will be available via your Research Student and Supervisor Handbook.



What's the purpose of a *Viva Voce*?

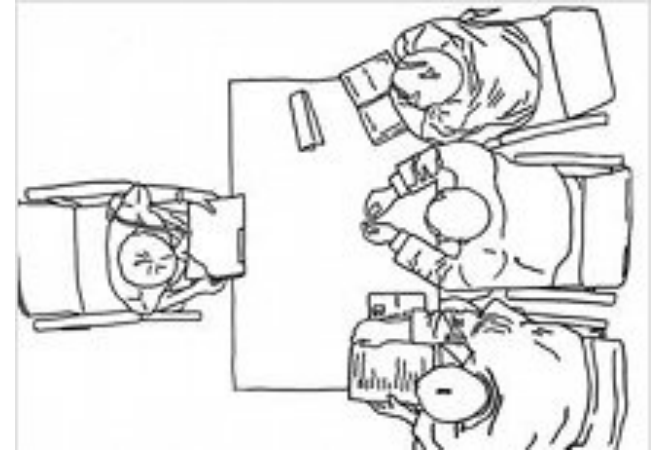
- The oral examination - for the award of a research degree “suitably qualified candidates who prepare, present and defend in examination a thesis describing original research which is their own work”
- An academic discussion between you and senior researchers in your field - your opportunity to show them that you possess a thorough understanding of your topic and that you can defend your own research ideas.
- How well do you understand the overall contribution and limitations of your research to your discipline.
- Your ability to explain underlying references / theories / methodologies.
- To check it is your work.
- **Challenging but enjoyable!**

Alternatives

- Many European countries have *vivas* but differ : –
 - Some examinations are adversarial (eg: Sweden)
 - Some examinations are public (eg: Sweden, France)
 - Thesis is not always modified (eg: France)
- Other systems –
 - *Viva-less* system – examiners submit a report which goes to a “local” committee (eg Australia)

What's the process?

- The examination panel
 - Independent report
 - Prior discussion
- How long?
- How will it end?
 - You will be asked to leave – examiners confer and reach a unanimous opinion
 - Recommendations and joint report
 - Any corrections/resubmission
- Final thesis copy submission



Go prepared

- Read your thesis and salient/seminal papers
 - Critically evaluate
 - Its OK to spot weaknesses as long as you recognise them
- Mock *viva voce*?
- Sleep well and look reasonably smart
- Take a copy in with you
- Any issues that you have since identified?
- Raw or additional data?
- Take paper and a pen.

What will you be asked?

- The first questions? – you can prepare for these
 - Tell me about your research degree.....
 - What was the purpose of your research; the research objective?
 - What were your main conclusions?
 - What were the limitations?
 - Outline the theoretical basis of your work....what are the alternative frameworks?
 - What are the implications of your work for theory and practice?
 - If you had your time again what would you do differently?

These are to get you talking and to get you settled take your time.....

Golden rules – LISTEN, take your time and think!!



- Then what? Usually go through your thesis, page by page, chapter by chapter.
 - Identify errors
 - Query / clarify the meaning of statements
 - Cross reference data or statements
 - Justify methods/ give details of techniques/ explain your sampling strategy
 - The literature
 - Define something
 - Explain how you did something
 - Alternative approaches
 - Data analysis - details
 - Limitations or obstacles
 - Main conclusions
 - Explain to what extent your work supports or contradicts existing literature on something
 - Future work How could your work apply to
 - What is your publication plan for the work?
 - Summarise your work in layman's terms.

How should you answer?

- Be precise and clear with your statements
 - Don't try to defend the indefensible
 - Be honest – don't try bluffing
 - Identify if you are speaking about someone else's work
 - Say if you don't understand or don't know
 - Ask if you need clarification
 - Can you speculate? – Yes, but say so.
 - The work may suggest...etc
 - Show that you know the difference between proven conclusions, current thinking and (informed) speculation
- Speak clearly; give clear and full explanations and formulate answers (avoid “yes” and “no” answers).
- Make eye contact – can the examiners follow your explanations?
- Silence after answers or questions is fine – people are thinking!

- Try to avoid going off on tangents
- Try to be confident but DON'T be arrogant
 - Let your examiners finish speaking before you answer
- Don't apportion blame (supervisors, equipment etc.)
- Don't take your examiners criticisms too personally or get angry.
 - Out of scope.... Different approachGenuine problem
- Open questions are an invitation for you to explain what you know about an area.
- If the examiner has misunderstood something you have written or said, try to explain it.
- If you need a break or water – say so.
- Relax – the examiners want to see that you are enjoying the discussion.

The outcome and what's next?

- The examiners may make one of the following recommendations (depending on your University Regulations):-
 - Thesis be accepted as presented, and that the candidate be approved for the award.
 - That the thesis be accepted subject to minor modifications or major modifications.
 - That the candidate be re-examined.
 - The thesis and research work is of insufficient scope or level, but that the candidate be awarded a lower degree (MPhil or MSc).
 - That the candidate has failed to satisfy the examining panel and that no award be made.

Graduation



Any questions?



Exercise

- Pair up. Spend 5-10 minutes thinking about your answers to some likely warm-up questions. Then take turns to act as examiner and candidate. (40 minutes total)

- Tell me about your research degree.....
- What was the purpose of your research; the research objective?
- What were your main conclusions?
- What were the limitations?
- Outline the theoretical basis of your work...what are the alternative frameworks?
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