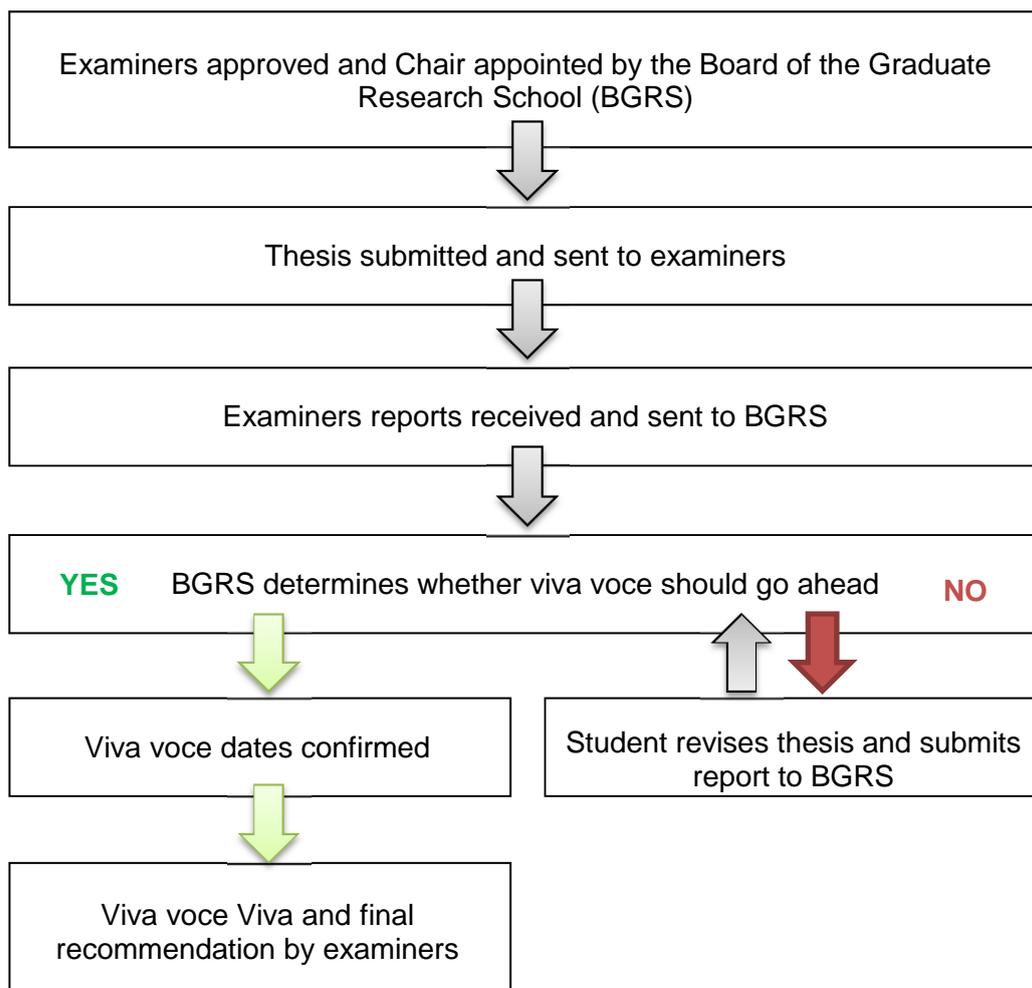


Role of the examination Chair

A viva voce examination Chair is appointed to ensure that the viva voce is conducted rigorously, fairly and respectfully and to provide guidance about policy and process where relevant. The Chair should not be called on to actively participate in the examination of the candidate. The Chair is normally appointed from the register of Level 3 supervisors to ensure that they are senior academics with extensive supervision experience and, ideally, experience as external examiners.

Viva voce process



Before the viva voce

The Chair will be provided with a copy of the examiners' reports and the thesis abstract and access to an electronic copy of the thesis (for reference only). The preliminary reports should be discussed with the examiners prior to the formal start of the viva and before the candidate is invited into the room. The purpose is to set an agenda for the viva voce and decide what key lines of questioning should be undertaken. If there are major differences of opinion between the two examiners, a working approach to how these will be dealt with during the oral should be established before the commencement of the examination.

During the viva voce

At the start of the viva voce, the Chair should invite the student into the room and help the candidate to feel at ease. The Chair should introduce the examiners to the candidate, explain their roles, the purpose of the viva voce, and the possible outcomes. The candidate should be offered opportunities to ask any questions relating to the procedures and conduct of the viva voce examination should they wish.

The Chair should then invite the candidate to provide a short (~10 minute) overview of the main research question, significance and outcomes of the thesis. The candidate should ideally be allowed to complete their summary without interruption. Questioning by the examiners should then follow in the manner agreed prior to commencement. Naturally, the viva voce examination is a dynamic process, and there will likely be opportunity for the examiners to follow lines of questioning at their discretion and to explore new avenues for questions as the discussion develops.

During the questioning by the examiners, the Chair should ensure that the student is given time to formulate a response, does not feel rushed and can consult the thesis and any notes they have made. The viva voce should proceed through discussion and considered debate, and not in the manner of question / answer. An ideal viva voce will allow the examiners and the candidate to explore the background to the work, with the candidate displaying knowledge of their project, its contribution to the discipline or field and any broader impact for future research. The question style allows the candidate to demonstrate appropriate levels of mastery of the topic, the research methods and wider context. The Chair is there to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to speak and that discussions are polite and respectful.

If the student appears not to have understood a question, the Chair may rephrase or ask the examiners to do so.

Should the candidate become agitated or unduly distressed, the Chair should offer the candidate a short break before continuing. If the examination goes for more than 90 minutes, the candidate and examiners should be offered a short comfort break.

After the viva voce

At the end of the examination, ask if the candidate has further information to provide to the examiners, or wishes to make any other comments or observations. The candidate should then be asked to leave the room while the examiners discuss their recommendation. During this period the Chair should complete the examination report, indicating the examiners' consideration of how the candidate performed during the viva voce, listing any revisions required (with possible reference back to the preliminary reports) and agreeing a final recommendation. The recommendation should be clear and specify unambiguously any corrections that must be made to the thesis and who will need to endorse them, such as the supervisors and graduate research coordinator (GRC) or Board of the Graduate Research School (BGRS). This task will be aided greatly if the Chair has made suitable notes regarding the conduct of the examination, the line of questions explored and the quality and confidence of the candidate's answers during the examination. If the candidate's performance is judged to be exceptional the examiners should be asked whether they both consider the candidate's work to be in the top 5% of theses they have examined.

After the examiners have completed their deliberation and reached a recommendation, the Chair should invite the candidate to return to the room and then inform the candidate of the recommendation that will be provided to the Board of the Graduate Research School.

Possible recommendations include:

- » Pass without corrections
- » Pass with revisions
- » Refer back to the BGRS with a recommendation for substantive revisions, resubmission, award of a Master or Fail.

The candidate may then be dismissed and allowed to leave the examination.

The final duty of the chair is to ensure that the examination report template is completed and signed by all examiners present before submitting to the GRS.

In the event that a consensus on the outcome cannot be reached, the matter will be escalated to the BGRS.

Video conference procedure

UWA uses the ZOOM software for videoconferencing and a link will be sent to examiners beforehand which they will use to connect. An officer from the GRS will set up the Zoom videoconference and ensure everything is working as it should be for the commencement of the examination.

On rare occasions videoconference facilities experience technical difficulties with sound or connectivity as a result of too many users on a network or poor quality internet at remote locations that cause problems ranging from a time delay between picture and words to a lack of any connection at all.

Sound

If problems occur with the sound during the videoconference, the Chair should halt the viva voce and advise all participants to;

» Check their audio settings;

- Check the audio input and output settings for Zoom (are participants muted or volume down too low?)
- Check computer microphone settings (is the microphone muted?)
- Check speaker cords are plugged in and speakers are turned on (if relevant)

» If the sound issues persist, log out of the Zoom teleconference and log back in using the same log-in details to attempt to rectify the problem.

» If the sound issue persists, the Chair will contact the University IT department on 6488 1515 and request immediate assistance.

» If the IT officer is unable to resolve the issue, the Chair is to initiate the traditional conference call and the examination will be completed via telephone (if possible).

» If for any reason the viva must be abandoned, the Chair is to halt proceedings and record the reasons and time on the Chairs report. The Chair will then contact the GRS immediately (Manager Examinations, Gavin-Fung 0423 463 866 or Linda Raynor-Thomas – 0439 757 890). The Manager Examinations and the Dean of the GRS will determine the next steps

Connectivity

If problems occur with connectivity, the chair should halt the viva voce and;

- » All parties experiencing connectivity issues should log out of the Zoom teleconference and log back in using the same log-in details to attempt to rectify the connectivity problem.
- » If the technical issue persists, the Chair will contact the University IT department on 6488 1515 and request immediate assistance.
- » If the IT officer is unable to resolve the connectivity issue, the Chair is to try and contact the remote examiner by mobile phone and the examination will be completed by telephone.
- » If for any reason the viva must be abandoned, the Chair is to halt proceedings and record the reasons and time on the Chairs report. The Chair will then contact the GRS immediately (Manager Examinations, Gavin-Fung 0423 463 866 or Linda Raynor-Thomas – 0439 757 890). The Manager Examinations and the Dean of the GRS will determine the next steps.

Checklist for viva Chairs

- Make note of time and location of viva and allow some flexibility, particularly at the end of the viva, as timings are unpredictable
- Attend an induction with the Dean GRS if this is your first time as a UWA viva Chair
- Make a note of important contact details in GRS in case of urgent queries
- Ensure you have copies of examiners' reports, final exam report template, thesis abstract and access to electronic version of thesis
- Make sure you have an up-to-date working knowledge of the Rules, policies and procedures governing graduate research at UWA
- Complete the examination form before inviting the candidate back into the viva room
- Obtain signatures of any external examiners physically present at the viva (note: you can still type up the other sections of the form if written notes are not clear)
- Ensure you return the signed final report to Examinations in GRS as soon after the viva as possible

Further Information

- [Viva voce guidelines](#)

This page has further advice for

- Candidates
- Examiners
- Supervisors and Schools

Contact



Questions about the viva voce process at UWA

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