



**Code of Practice:
Chairing Viva Voce Examinations
for Research Degree by Thesis / Published Work**

Updated:	February 2012
Frequency of Update:	As required
Responsibility to Update:	Chair of the Postgraduate Research Board

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Taking into account external expectations (especially Section I of the *QAA Code of Practice: Postgraduate Research Programmes*) and practice at other institutions, HYMS has resolved that all *viva voce* examinations for research degrees by thesis must be chaired by a member of academic staff (including those with honorary appointments) of either the University of Hull or the University of York independent of the student presenting the thesis and the examiners. This code governs the appointment and duties of chairs.
- 1.2. The presence of an independent chair is designed to ensure that the *viva voce* examination is conducted in a fair and ordered manner. It is a protection mechanism for both student and examiners in the event of subsequent allegations of misconduct or bias on behalf of the examiners.

2. Scope

- 2.1. This code applies to all degrees classified by the HYMS Joint Learning and Teaching Committee as research by thesis at both Master's and doctoral level.

3. Authority

- 3.1. The HYMS Joint Learning and Teaching Committee is the final arbiter of the interpretation and application of this code of practice.

4. Appointment of chairs

- 4.1. Chairs will be appointed by the HYMS Board of Studies from members of a list of approved chairs with appropriate experience nominated via the Postgraduate Research Board by the Heads of Centres at both Universities.
- 4.2. The list of approved chairs shall be considered annually and revised as appropriate.
- 4.3. In considering such nominations, HYMS Board of Studies should have regard to achieving a list which reflects the diversity of the Universities' staff, honorary staff and student bodies.
- 4.4. The HYMS Board of Studies, acting through the HYMS Postgraduate Research Board, is responsible for ensuring that members of academic staff accepted onto the list of approved chairs receive appropriate staff development regarding the proper conduct of *viva voce* examinations, including awareness of relevant regulations and procedures.

5. Appointment for individual to chair *viva voce* examinations

- 5.1. In determining which member of the approved list to appoint to each examination, the HYMS Board of Studies must ensure that:

- The chair has not had direct involvement with the student's thesis.
 - The chair is not one of the examiners of the thesis.
- 5.2. The chair is not required to have any knowledge of the subject of the thesis, nor is s/he required to read the thesis.

6. Duties of the chair

The chair is responsible for the following:

- 6.1. Chairing the preliminary meeting of the examiners, including agreeing a structure and format for the viva, including the roles of the examiners (taking into account HYMS expectations).
- 6.2. Introducing all those present at the *viva voce* examination, including attempting to put all parties at their ease.
- 6.3. Ensuring that all those present understand the procedures to be followed.
- 6.4. Outlining the structure and format of the *viva voce* to all those present.
- 6.5. Intervening in the examining process only if there appears to be bias, misconduct, unfairness or if the examiners are diverting from the agreed format of the viva in such a manner as to disadvantage the student, or if the chair believes the viva is progressing in a manner which could compromise academic standards. Actions which might be taken include calling a temporary halt to the meeting, holding a private discussion with the examiners or the candidate, or, most exceptionally, ending the examination.
- 6.6. Chairing the post-viva discussion of the examiners and assisting them in the formulation of a recommendation.
- 6.7. Ensuring that the examiners complete and sign the relevant forms at the end of the viva.
- 6.8. Ensure that the recommendation of the examiners is conveyed to the student in a professional manner and making sure the student is clear as to what may be required of the student, and that the student understands that s/he will receive a formal letter from the Postgraduate Research Board detailing the recommendation of the examiners.
- 6.9. Providing information for any subsequent appeal procedure.