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2	Document approver		VPC	
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4	Document change history			
	A	Document Change Tracking Number	Date released	Change originator
		66/2025	23.10.2025	Dr Tatjana Chircop, Dr Lorna Bonnici West, Dr Alex Rizzo
		Change history (Section/change details)		
		• New Document		
	Document change history			
		Document Change Tracking Number	Date released	Change originator
		Change history (Section/change details)		

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1. Introduction

This document aims to describe the process and the roles of the key stakeholders of viva sessions for MQF/EQF Level 8 Research Programmes.

2. Scope

This procedure applies to all viva sessions for the MCAST Professional Research Doctorate (DRes) on the Competitive Behaviour of Small Organizations.

This document emerges from and aims to solely support L.N. 302 of 2021 and the respective MCAST regulations DOC008 "PROGRAMME REGULATIONS DOCTORATE IN RESEARCH (MQF LV8)".

Reference is made to the latter documents, which provide further detail and need to be aligned throughout the entire process.

3. Abbreviations

- 3.1 DDC: Doctoral Degree Committee
- 3.2 DTSC: Doctoral Technical Sub-Committee
- 3.3 EP: Examiner Panel
- 3.4 EPS: Examiner Panel Secretary
- 3.5 VPC: Vocational & Professional Council

4. The Pre-Viva Session Process

- 4.1. The Principal Supervisor, responsible for the acceptance of the doctoral submission (as per L.N. 302 of 2021 Clause 8.2), is to inform the DTSC of the candidate's readiness to sit for a viva at least eight (8) weeks in advance of a possible thesis submission. The DTSC shall liaise with the Principal Supervisor to verify the evidence of student deliverables, as per L.N. 302 of 2021 Clauses 5(2) and 6(2). A representative of the DTSC is to inform the DDC accordingly.
- 4.2. It shall be the responsibility of the doctoral candidate to ensure that two spiral-bound colour copies of the final thesis (the front sheet approved and signed by the Principal Supervisor), as well as an identical electronic version for replication purposes and the plagiarism report (as per L.N. 302 of 2021 Clauses 7(3) and 7(5)) are submitted to the DTSC and DDC, via the Principal Supervisor, on or before the thesis submission deadline.
 - 4.2.1. If the Doctoral Candidate believes that the thesis manuscript is ready and of adequate quality for successful viva defence, but no approval is forthcoming from the Principal Supervisor, the student is to refer to L.N. 302 of 2021 Clause 8.6.
- 4.3. As per L.N. 302 of 2021 Clause 5.4, providing the description requirements of each, the EP will consist of:
 - a) Panel Convenor
 - b) External Examiner
 - c) Internal Examiner
 - d) Panel Secretary



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Upon being notified of a doctoral submission, the DDC shall select the EPS. The EPS shall act as the interface between the student's supervisory team, the DTSC, the DDC, and the EP.

The DDC shall also:

- a) appoint the Panel Convenor;
- b) seek recommendations from the DTSC in liaison with the Principal Supervisor for the nomination of an External and Internal Examiner. All Examiners will be contacted by the EPS and will be requested to provide a Curriculum Vitae (CV), which will be evaluated by the DTSC and DDC to ensure that the examiners are deemed to have suitable expertise in the field and experience in viva examinations. The DDC shall liaise with the Quality Assurance Department for cost and administration purposes. Upon reviewing and confirming the suitability of the examiners, the DDC will seek approval of the External and Internal Examiners from the VPC and will then proceed to appoint the rest of the EP, which includes the Panel Convenor, External Examiner, and Internal Examiner.

(Note 1: The Panel Convenor appointed by the DDC will be responsible for solely chairing the examination and ensuring the associated administration of the Viva is completed satisfactorily. The Panel Convenor will not examine the thesis.

Note 2: The candidate shall take no part in the appointment of the EP, who in turn shall have no communication with the candidate in relation to the thesis and viva between the appointment of the examiners and the viva.

Note 3: All the EP members shall be asked to declare any potential conflict of interest. Conflict of interest constitutes one or more of the following:

- a) Personal relationships such as family members or relatives of the candidate or close friends of the candidate, current or past romantic relationships with the candidate.
- b) Commercial relationship with the candidate.
- c) Current or recent supervisors or mentors of the candidate.
- d) Significant personal connections with the candidate which could lead to possible biases.
- e) Known biases or prejudices towards the candidate.

4.4. As per L.N. 302 of 2021 Clauses 8.3 and 8.5, an initial evaluation report is to be compiled by both supervisors and submitted to the DDC via the EPS, together with the two approved manuscripts and other manuscript copies as necessary. The EPS shall reproduce other copies of the thesis for internal use and provide to the EP as necessary.

4.5. The EPS shall have available the annual supervisor feedback reports (DOC 428) to provide to the EP, if requested.

4.6. The viva-based final assessment shall take place within six (6) months of the Candidate submitting the formal thesis for evaluation as per L.N. 302 of 2021 Clauses 8.5.

4.7. Each examiner shall read and examine the thesis. Within six weeks of receipt of the thesis, and before the viva examination takes place, each examiner shall have submitted an independent preliminary report (DOC 482) to the Convenor, via the EPS. When completing the preliminary report, each examiner shall consider whether the thesis provisionally satisfies the requirements of the degree and, where possible, make an appropriate



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provisional recommendation subject to the outcome of the viva. The preliminary report shall be confidential prior to the viva. The EP may opt to refuse to evaluate a thesis that falls below the expectations of a properly compiled doctoral endeavour (as per L.N. 302 of 2021 Clause 7(3)).

4.7.1. When evaluating the doctoral thesis, the EP will take into consideration the supervisors' initial evaluation reports (as per L.N. 302 of 2021 Clause 5(3)) and the plagiarism report (as per L.N. 302 of 2021 Clause 7(3)).

4.8. In any instance where the Convenor is made aware of a material failure to comply with all the procedures of the examination process, they may declare the examination null and void, and the DDC, following approval by the VPC, shall appoint new examiners.

4.9. The EPS shall:

- Request the final thesis (in two spiral-bound colour copies and electronic format) and the plagiarism report from the candidate's Principal Supervisor, as approved by the Supervisor;
- Send :
 - a copy of the thesis to each examiner;
 - the plagiarism report to the EP members;
 - the MCAST Regulations (DOC 008 and DOC 453) and L.N. 302 of 2021 to the EP Members
- ensure that the EP members are appropriately briefed as to their duties.
- Send a copy of the examiner's preliminary report form (DOC 482) to the Internal and External Examiners and a copy of the joint report form to the Convenor (DOC137).
- Request both Examiners to provide an initial evaluation report (DOC 482);
- Establish a viva date and coordinate the closed viva process, ensuring a quiet, uninterrupted environment;
- Formally notify the DDC and DTSC, the EP, and the candidate of the arrangements for the Viva in writing, at least three weeks beforehand.

Reference Documents:

- *"Doc008: PROGRAMME REGULATIONS DOCTORATE IN RESEARCH (MQF LV8)" Regulatory and Operational Framework for Applied Research*
- *"Doc482: PROFESSIONAL RESEARCH DOCTORATE (DRES) ON THE COMPETITIVE BEHAVIOUR OF SMALL ORGANIZATIONS PRELIMINARY VIVA REPORT FORM"*
- *"Doc137: PROFESSIONAL RESEARCH DOCTORATE (DRES) ON THE COMPETITIVE BEHAVIOUR OF SMALL ORGANIZATIONS VIVA REPORT FORM"*

5. The Viva Session

5.1. Subject to consent by the candidate, the Supervisor is invited to attend the session as a silent observer (with non-voting capacity), as per L.N. 302 of 2021 Clause 5(4).

5.2. The Convenor shall explain the structure of the Viva to the EP and the candidate (i.e. presentation followed by questions, immediate discussions or otherwise).

5.3. The Convenor shall coordinate the entire process of the viva session, keeping timing, set closure etc.



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6. The Post-Viva Process

6.1. As per L.N. 302 of 2021 Clause 5(5), the EP shall be tasked with providing to the DDC an adequately detailed and conclusive examiner joint report using DOC 137 within two weeks of the candidate's completion of the viva, identifying which grading option has been convened.

6.1.1. The Convenor, with the support of the EPS, shall be responsible for collating all the Examiners' reports and shall seek an agreement amongst examiners regarding the outcome of the Viva.

6.1.2. In the very exceptional instant that the EP is in internal disagreement, a majority vote shall be cast and taken as final direction for the DDC to act upon as per L.N. 302 of 2021 Clause 5(5). This means that the Convenor is to intervene and provide the final decision and report accordingly (DOC 137), while submitting the examiners' separate reports to the DDC.

6.2. It shall be the responsibility of the DDC to convey all necessary result information to the Doctoral Candidate, possibly through the Principal Supervisor and EPS. This formal notification shall be completed within one week for the DDC to provide the candidate with the formal viva result information, as per L.N. 302 of 2021 Clause 5(5).

6.3. The examiners may recommend to the DDC one of the five options as per L.N. 302 of 2021 Clause 5(5) table.

6.4. In cases where changes are requested, changes are approved as follows:

Post-Viva Amendments (If Applicable)

Outcome	Timeframe for Amendments	Changes Approved by:
Option 1: Pass with No or Minimal Amendments	Up to 4 weeks	A recommendation to the DDC, through the Doctoral Convenor, that the student be awarded the DRes shall be made after the Convenor confirms that the requested changes have been adequately addressed.
Option 2: Pass with Lesser Amendments	Up to 12 weeks	A recommendation to the DDC, through the Doctoral Convenor, that the student be awarded the DRes shall be made after the Convenor confirms that the requested changes have been adequately addressed.
Option 3: Pass with Significant Amendments	Up to 6 months	The EP confirms that the requested changes have been adequately addressed following approval by both the Principal Supervisor and the Second Supervisor.
Option 4: Viva Repeat & Thesis Resubmission	Resubmit within 1 year (repeat viva)	The EP confirms that the resubmission and the repeat viva are successful.
Option 5: Fail	No further submission (or award Master by Research)	As per L.N, 5(5), if the EP deems that the work being submitted is of adequate master's-level rigour and the Master by Research option is selected, the 'Academic Research Grading Rubric' (DOC382) is to be used by the EP to provide the final thesis mark and grade.



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After the Convenor confirms one of the above outcomes, a recommendation to the DDC, through the EPS, shall be made that the student be awarded the DRes or otherwise. If the changes are not satisfactorily addressed or are not addressed within the stipulated timeframe, the thesis is considered as fail.

- 6.5. Having confirmed the recommendation from the EP through the Convenor and EPS, the DDC shall, where appropriate, submit the outcome to the respective Institute/Centre. The institute/centre will inform the Registrar who will invite the candidate for graduation. formally confer the award. Additionally, the Institute/Centre shall input the classification on the College's Data Management Software, and the EPS shall inform the candidate of the result.

Arbitration may be sought by the Doctoral Candidate, possibly as an outcome of the EP conclusions following viva evaluation of the thesis manuscript. Arbitration process is to follow L.N. 302 of 2021 Clause 9.

- 6.6. Following a successful viva examination, and after the necessary revisions have been made to the thesis and duly approved, the Doctoral Candidate is to provide by no later than four weeks, the copies of the thesis as per L.N. 302 of 2021 Clause 7(6), including a softcopy. One hard copy of the thesis will be retained in one of the MCAST Libraries, while the Institute/Centre will retain another two hard copies. The cover, spine, and back page of the hard-bound dissertation copies are to follow the format and design stipulated in MCAST DOC 100.
- 6.7. Candidates who fail to submit all copies of their thesis in time shall have their Certificates withheld. Whilst such students will be allowed to take part in the graduation ceremony, however, they will only be provided with a Transcript. The Certificate will only be issued upon the submission of all copies of the final thesis as required by this procedure.