

Doctoral Progress and Exams

What do you want? What do Universities want?

What I am going to try to cover

- Defence versus offence?
- Transfer and Final Examination
- Guidance versus reality?
- What do you want to happen?
- When to fight and when to concede in a viva situation?
- Reasonable adjustments, and unreasonable behaviour
- Actuality versus mythology?

The Questions

- 1. What do you understand by 'Progression' in the context of doctoral studies?*
- 2. Do you think your university provides enough support for interim exams during the PhD and the final viva?*
- 3. What is the single most important thing your university can do to help you prepare for interim exams during the PhD and the final viva?*
- 4. How do you feel about your upcoming interim exam/ final viva?*

Transfer: what does your University want?

- PGRs AND supervisors to get feedback on their progress
- Quality control
 - Supervisory team
 - Student
- Option to change things
- Positive/constructive experience?
- Independent oversight
- Better and quicker successful completion!
- Welfare check

Final exam (and viva): for the University

- Certainty that the work meets the learning outcomes:
 - Original contribution
 - Worthy of publication
 - Knowledge of field
- Opportunity to ask questions where there is doubt
- Opportunity to examine the person (not the writing)
- Independent validation of the outcome (report forms)
- A good academic discussion which is of value to the candidate
- Opportunity to resolve differences between examiners!
- Is the work yours?

(NB the viva in the UK is very unusual)

Problems you might encounter

- Being nervous (preparation/peers/supervisors/practice)
- Unexpected/unreasonable questions (just expect this)
- Examiners that don't ask questions (help them)
- Examiners with an agenda (everyone has one, don't get distracted)
- Rude or aggressive manner (this is a really tough one to answer)
- Examiners that have misunderstood (it's your job to help them)
- Focus on tiny details at expense of whole (again try to steer)
- Race and gender bias (or other biases) (not your job to deal with this, but you shouldn't assume you know why questions are being asked)
- Duration (ask for a break)
- Don't assume a final viva will be like your transfer!
- Ask for reasonable adjustments

What if it goes wrong

- Few fails/referrals at final stage
- Very few appeals made
- Appeals DO get upheld
- Raise issues in accordance with the regulations
- Check in with you supervisor(s)
- Consider whether you want a supervisor in attendance
- If there is an independent chair object at the time?
- Ditto if there isn't?