
Notes for Examiners for the Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA)

Reference: [Doctoral Regulations for PhD and other Doctorates with Theses](#) section 15

Thank you for agreeing to examine a Victoria University of Wellington DMA candidate's thesis. Here is some information on the doctoral examination process at Victoria University. For further information, please refer to the [Thesis examination standard terms and conditions](#) or email the Faculty of Graduate Research (FGR) Thesis Examinations Team at fgr-exams@vuw.ac.nz

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Outline of the Doctor of Musical Arts

1. The fields of study for this degree are composition and performance. Part 1 (year 1) comprises (i) coursework, (ii) the preparation of a research proposal that specifies the scope of the creative work and the relationship between the creative work and the exegesis, and (iii) creative research expressed through either a portfolio of compositions or sound-based works, or a public recital. Part 2 (years 2-3) comprises the continuation of research demonstrated through creative work, and the writing of an exegesis.
2. For composition, the research to be examined as the thesis comprises a portfolio of compositions and public presentation(s), and an exegesis not exceeding 40,000 words (including footnotes, bibliography, and appendices).
3. For performance, the research to be examined as the thesis comprises two recitals, two lecture-recitals, and an exegesis not exceeding 40,000 words (including footnotes, bibliography, and appendices).
4. Further notes on the thesis components:
 - a. "Creative work" comprises EITHER (i) a portfolio of compositions, OR (ii) a series of performances, which may include improvisations, demonstrations of new or created or revived performance techniques, or transcriptions of musical "works".
 - b. "Exegesis" refers to the extended written essay that complements the creative work of the candidate. It is intended to be a substantive piece of writing that offers a critical perspective on the

creative work. Normally, the exegesis will take the form of a written piece that conforms to the academic standards and formatting expectations of a doctoral thesis. But in some cases the exegesis for the DMA may take other forms that have been pre-approved by Postgraduate Committee of the New Zealand School of Music and/or the Faculty of Graduate Research. In these cases, a short report detailing the rationale behind the atypical approach will be appended to the submission of the exegesis by the candidate.

5. The DMA degree is awarded for a thesis which demonstrates the following:
 - a. Professional competency at a high level;
 - b. Originality and creativity in the approach to composition or performance;
 - c. Familiarity with, and critical insight into, relevant literature and contemporary thinking in the subject;
 - d. A sufficiently comprehensive yet focussed study of the topic in the exegesis, which may present either new knowledge, an innovative re-interpretation of one or more existing concepts, or the formulation of new theories/ perspectives relevant to composition or performance.

About the Examiners

The DMA thesis is examined by three examiners who are people with standing in the field of study of the thesis. One of the examiners will normally be a member of an overseas university or similar institution (the overseas examiner); normally one examiner will be from another New Zealand university (the external New Zealand examiner); the third examiner will normally be an academic member of the New Zealand School of Music (the internal examiner).

Examiners must not communicate with the candidate except through the Faculty of Graduate Research (FGR) before the completion of the examination process. Any consultation between examiners and supervisors must also be conducted through the Dean FGR.

Conflicts of interest

The appointment of examiners is subject to the University's [Conflicts of Interest Statute](#). Current or former supervisors or researchers who have co-published (or collaborated) with the candidate, may not be appointed as examiners. If during the examination process you discover a potential conflict of interest, or any other problem, please inform the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Research (FGR), via FGR-Exams@vuw.ac.nz

Examiner report

You are asked to write a report on the quality of the thesis (*as defined in section 2 and 3 of the Outline on page 1 of these notes*) and to make a confidential recommendation to the Dean FGR on the outcome.

In the detailed report on the thesis, your comments and suggestions should be sufficient to enable the University to gauge the quality of the thesis. Comments on the following would be appreciated. The extent to which the candidate has demonstrated:

1. Professional competency at a high level;
2. Originality and creativity in the approach to composition or performance;
3. Familiarity with and critical insight into relevant literature and contemporary thinking in the subject;
4. A sufficiently comprehensive yet focussed study of the topic in the exegesis which may present either new knowledge, an innovative re-interpretation of one or more existing concepts, or the formulation of new theories/perspectives relevant to composition or performance.

Please **do not** include the recommendation in your report on the thesis, as this is released to the candidate. Instead, use the **Examiner Reports** form in our online system, [Panoho](#) (See below for more information).

Examiners' reports are typically of at least 3-4 pages in length and are expected to provide the candidate with constructive feedback. Where revisions to any part of the thesis are called for, you are encouraged to be very specific about those revisions that you feel are crucial to the acceptability of the thesis as a whole, bearing in mind that a specific set of revisions will be agreed upon by the examiners after the oral defence.

Examiners' reports must be independent. Consultation among examiners before their reports have been submitted is not permitted. In cases where examiners make differing recommendations in their reports, the Dean FGR may require consultation to occur before the oral defence.

Examiner Reports should be uploaded into the form in Panoho and the form submitted within two months of your receiving the thesis. Please **do not** send your report directly to the Head of School or supervisor.

Examiner Reports workflow in Panoho

We use an online research student management system called Panoho for the examination process. Examiners receive an account to log in and download the thesis documents for review.

The Examiner Report workflow is used to upload your Examiner Report and to submit your confidential recommendation to the Dean, FGR by the agreed due date, usually within eight weeks of receiving the thesis. Please do not include your examination recommendation in your report.

The Examiners Recommendation tab is separate and is not shared with the candidate. As well as your recommendation as to the quality of the thesis, it asks you to make a confidential recommendation on whether the thesis should be considered for inclusion in the Dean's List.

Once all examiner's reports are submitted, they are reviewed by the Dean. The candidate receives the reports in full after the Dean confirms that the viva will proceed.

If you wish to raise concerns that are not directly related to the thesis, such as matters relating to supervision or resources, please provide these in a separate confidential report addressed to the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Research via email FGR-Exams@vuw.ac.nz

Academic Integrity

If you believe that the thesis contains plagiarised material or you have other concerns about academic integrity in this thesis, then please tick "yes" and either:

For minor concerns, outline your concerns in your report (those that could reasonably be addressed by the candidate in amendments or revisions).

For more serious concerns, email FGR-Exams@vuw.ac.nz summarising your concerns. The Exams Team will take your concerns to the Dean.

Recommendation

The recommendations in the Examiner Reports form are confidential to the Dean and are available to the Chair of the oral examination committee. They are primarily used to determine whether or not the viva should proceed. In general, if two or three examiners indicated that the thesis was substandard (the third option), the viva would not be approved, and the candidate may be given the option of revising the thesis for further examination.

You are asked to advise the Dean, FGR with your recommendation from the following three options:

- The thesis is of sufficiently high standard to meet the requirements of a Doctorate, although it may require minor editorial changes – this clearly should proceed to oral exam.
- The thesis is not yet of a standard that meets the requirements of a Doctorate, and there are matters that must be addressed – this should proceed to oral exam at which these matters can be discussed.
- The thesis is substandard with respect to the requirements of a Doctorate – the Dean should consult with all of the examiners as to whether an oral exam is appropriate at this stage or whether the candidate should instead be requested to revise and resubmit for re-examination.

Dean's List recommendation

The Dean's list is reserved for theses that are judged to be of exceptional quality. That quality is expected to be shown in every aspect of the candidate's work, including the originality and significance of the research and scholarship, and the quality of expression and overall presentation. The Dean will also receive a recommendation on the quality of the viva and the level of correction required. Timeliness of completion may also be taken into consideration. You are asked if you recommend that the thesis be considered for inclusion on the Dean's list.

Questions for the viva

The Examination Committee for the viva consists of the internal examiner, the New Zealand examiner, and an independent Chair appointed by the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Research.

Therefore, both the Internal and New Zealand examiners should answer "yes" to this question in the online form. The overseas examiner is not expected to attend and therefore will usually answer "no" and will then be asked to provide three to five questions for the Examination Committee to ask on their behalf.

Unless the whole viva is to be held online at the candidate's request, the internal examiner is expected to attend in person.

The New Zealand examiner is expected to attend by video conference (Zoom) but may attend in person if available.

The overseas examiner is not expected to attend the viva, but must submit questions as part of their assessment. They may attend if available.

The Faculty of Graduate Research has no funding to support examiner travel or related expenses. If you wish to explore the possibility of attending at the candidate's School's expense, please contact the FGR Exams team at FGR-Exams@vuw.ac.nz to discuss this.

Further consultation

If there are significant issues raised in the reports, or significant differences of opinion among the examiners, the Dean may initiate further consultation directly with the examiners, usually via the circulation of anonymised reports.

Distribution of reports

Once the decision to proceed to viva has been confirmed, all examiners' reports will be made available simultaneously to the candidate, the supervisor(s), and other examiners at least five working days prior to the viva. Reports will be released with the names of the examiners. The candidate will not have access to view the examiners' recommendations. However, the comments, suggestions and overall assessment of the thesis will indicate matters that may arise in the viva.

About the viva (oral examination)

A viva is a mandatory part of the examination process at Victoria University. The oral examination will usually be conducted by the New Zealand and internal examiners under an independent chair and questions provided by the overseas examiner will be presented to the candidate. It may also be possible for the overseas examiner to be involved via audio or video link. However, overseas examiners are still required to submit their questions in writing. For DMA candidates, both the primary and secondary supervisor will normally be in attendance, but not as part of the examining panel and not during the examiners' deliberations about the outcome of the oral defence.

Movement to a viva is not automatic but requires scrutiny of all reports by the Dean FGR. As noted above, further consultation may sometimes be necessary before the oral can be approved. At such time, anonymised reports will be circulated among the examiners.

A time and date for the viva will be arranged by FGR shortly after the thesis is sent out to examiners. The arrangements are made well in advance because we understand the constraints on examiners' schedules. This date is provisional until the Dean has approved the viva, after considering the three examiners' reports. The setting of a provisional date does not in any way imply an expectation of a particular outcome.



Any part of your report that you do not want released to the candidate or a third party should be emailed in a separate document to FGR-Exams@vuw.ac.nz (not included in Panoho) and marked "Confidential to the Examiners". The University is subject to the provisions of the Official Information Act and the Privacy Act. Opinion from both the Ombudsman and the Privacy Commissioner indicates that your report may be considered personal information about the candidate. The candidate could request access to it under the Official Information Act. If such a request is made, the University must establish whether or not there is a reason to withhold the examiner's report under the provisions of the relevant Act.

Amendments or revisions and confirmation of results

The examination panel will determine, at the viva, what corrections or amendments the candidate is required to make to the thesis before the degree can be awarded. These will be documented by the panel and released to the candidate in the Examination Outcome workflow in Panoho. Approval of such corrections is managed by the School and usually delegated to the internal examiner. If a candidate is required to revise and resubmit the thesis for second examination, they will need to complete the revisions under supervision. The Dean FGR will confirm the overall recommendation of the examination panel.

For more information, please refer to our [Thesis Examination Standard Terms and Conditions](#) for examiners.