

Transcript: Bice Maiguashca on contact between examiners

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What contact do the internal and external examiners have before the viva, and what do they have to produce before the viva starts?

Bice Maiguashca

So, the internal and external normally contact each other after they've read the thesis: in fact, it's the internal's job to organise the time and place of the viva, and to agree that with the external and the student. Then the internal and external, each separately (without consulting with each other), write what's called a preliminary report. In that preliminary report, they normally start off by summarising what they think the PhD is trying to do, so their understanding of what the aims of these are, the rationale and the methodology. So that's normally the first couple of paragraphs of the preliminary report. That's why it's so important in your introduction, you make sure that those key aspects of the thesis are clear. Then they go on to assess each one of them in some detail - in other words, they offer their evaluation of how well the student has done each - and then they determine a preliminary outcome. In other words, they recommend minor revisions, or major revisions, or a pass, an unconditional pass. Those preliminary reports are then exchanged prior to the viva, usually some days before, and so that each can reflect on the views of the other. Then they usually meet wherever the is taking place, often over lunch prior to the viva or or over coffee. They discuss their agreements and disagreements before they go in to the viva. So when you - when the student enters into the room, internal and external have already met each other; they've already had a substantive discussion about the thesis and about their views. There will always be some differences. And they will have come to an initial view on the thesis and its quality, and the recommendation they would like to make. At the end of the two- or three-hour viva, students will be asked to step outside, and the internal and external will deliberate once again and see whether, in fact, their view still stands, or whether, in fact, they want to shift that view based on the viva. That's why the viva does matter.