

Transcript: Michelle Bolduc on examiners' reports and examination criteria

Edward Mills

You've mostly worked as an internal examiner, is that correct?

Michelle Bolduc

That's right.

Edward Mills

So - in the UK system at least - what contact is there between the the internal and the external examiner before the viva itself?

Michelle Bolduc

There is quite a bit of contact, typically. We each have to fill out a preliminary report form, and in that report form, we give a sense of whether or not imagine that the dissertation fulfils the criteria for the award of the Ph.D., so we have to be in agreement about that.

Edward Mills

So I'm sure many of us will already be familiar with what these criteria that you mention are. But can I ask if you'd be willing to just run through them again for anybody who's come across these for the first time?

Michelle Bolduc

Of course. There are five criteria, and you can find these in the TQA manual. Basically, you need to have shown that you've created and interpreted some kind of new knowledge. It needs to be original research, some advanced scholarship, something that peer-review quality, extending the forefront of the discipline and that merits publication. That's that's the first criterion. The second is a showing a systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge, again, at the forefront of an academic discipline. You need to show the general ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, and the ability to adjust the project design in light of unforeseen problems. The fourth is a detailed understanding of applicable techniques and advanced academic enquiry, and finally a satisfactory level of literary presentation. So basically, candidates, when they submit their thesis, the preliminary reports look at whether or not the thesis meets these criteria. So is there something original about it? Does it advance our knowledge in the discipline? Is it written in a high form of academic discourse or

not? I think the viva is really important because it gives the candidate a chance to expose what he or she has been working on for many, many years, and for examiners to talk about the strengths and weaknesses of that approach, to give feedback, to give ideas for how this might be shaped into a book, that kind of thing. Believe it or not, for me, the viva is meant to be much more of a friendly process. I know that it probably didn't feel like that to you, but by the time you are at the level of submitting a PhD thesis, it means that you're entering into a different circle, if you will. You're becoming a peer as opposed to a student.