

Preparing and Conducting the Pre-defence

Information Society Technologies PhD Program

Purpose of the Pre-Defence

The pre-defence examination is organised by the School of Digital Technologies as part of the review and defence of the final thesis that the PhD students submit. In line with similar procedures in other parts of the world¹, the purpose of the pre-defence is to engage PhD students in an academic discussion with research colleagues about their own work. Students will have received two reviews of their written work by independent experts. The pre-defence then is a verbal examination of students work in which

- Students need to demonstrate that the thesis is their own work, confirm they understand what they have written and can defend it verbally
- Students demonstrate awareness of how their work is related to other work in the field
- The committee establishes whether the thesis is of sufficiently high standard to merit the award of a PhD
- Feedback is gathered that allows the student to develop the written thesis in response to the reviewers' questions

Procedure prior to the Pre-Defence

After the student and the supervisor have agreed that the thesis is in a form that it can be submitted, the thesis is submitted to the Director of the School of Digital Technologies for "Pre-defence". The director of the school will appoint two independent reviewers (one of them needs to come from outside TLU), will form a pre-defence committee and agree a date for the pre-defence. The reviewers are asked to submit their written review at least three days prior to the pre-defence so that students are aware of the feedback. The reviewers are invited to attend the pre-defence session (possibly over Skype).

Procedure during the Pre-Defence

The pre-defence is a closed session in which the members of the pre-defence committee, the two reviewers, the student and the supervisor(s) participate. The closed format ensures that an honest and open discussion can be held. All members of the committee have read the thesis prior to coming to the pre-defence, so everyone is aware of the content of the thesis.

¹ E.g. <http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/gradschool/training/eresources/study-guides/viva/about>

Following is the process of the pre-defence:

- 1) The head of the pre-defence commission shortly introduces all members and gives an overview of the schedule
- 2) The student presents his thesis in 20 minutes supported by slides. The time limit is strict, so no extension will be given. The main focus of the presentation should be on the research contributions of the thesis. An approximate split of the time could be:
 - a) Introduction, Motivation and Research Problem (2-3 minutes)
 - b) Research Contributions (15 minutes)
 - c) Conclusions and Future Work (2-3 minutes)
- 3) The reviewers have the chance to discuss with the student their comments of their review as well as additional questions that have been brought up by the presentation. Duration of this part will be 40-50 minutes, but it can be longer if the reviewers require it.
- 4) The other members of the pre-defence committee have the chance to ask questions for up to 20 minutes.
- 5) The pre-defence committee meets in a closed session (without student and supervisor(s)) to arrive at a decision.

Result of the Pre-defence

The internal discussion of pre-defence committee will result in one of the following decisions

- Accepted: The thesis qualifies as a dissertation and should be submitted for defence
- Revisions Required: The thesis qualifies as a dissertation and should be submitted for defence only after corrections have been made by the student, or
- Rejected: The thesis does not qualify as a dissertation in its current form, it should be returned to the student for significant rework, and submitted again for pre-defence.

In case of a rejection, the student needs to again apply for a pre-defence, but only after at least 6 months have passed.

In case of revisions required, the protocol of the pre-defence will contain recommendations of what should be corrected. When submitting the thesis for defence after these corrections have been made, the student needs to explain in writing how these recommendations were taken into account.