

Policy and Procedure for the Appointment of Research Degree Examiners

Introduction and General Principles

1. This procedure applies to the appointment of internal and external examiners for the following Imperial College London research degrees:
 - Master of Philosophy (MPhil)
 - Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
 - Doctor of Medicine (Research) (MD[Res])
 - Doctor of Engineering (EngD)
2. This procedure sets out the requirements for the appointment of research degree examiners. It is intended to safeguard the integrity of the final examination process and the robustness of academic standards. It also ensures that the final examination is conducted through independent and objective assessment, both in practice and in perception.
3. Examiners are responsible for upholding appropriate and consistent academic standards, and for ensuring alignment with relevant sector benchmarks, expectations, and conditions of registration.
4. Each research degree candidate will undertake a final examination, comprising the submission of a thesis and a viva voce examination. The candidate will be examined by no fewer than two examiners. Normally, there will be no more than two examiners, one internal and one external to the university. At least one examiner must have prior experience of examining research degrees at a research-intensive UK university. Examiners should be experts in the field of the thesis, with combined expertise sufficient to enable full assessment of both the thesis and the candidate's performance in the viva voce examination.
5. Under specific conditions, the candidate may be examined by more than two examiners (but not normally more than three). These conditions may include where the internal examiner does not meet the level of experience outlined in paragraph 6 or where the interdisciplinary nature of the research requires multiple areas of expertise.

Eligibility for Appointment of Examiners

Internal Examiners

6. The role of the internal examiner is to provide expert academic scrutiny of the thesis and the candidate's performance in the viva voce examination, and to ensure that the final examination is

conducted in accordance with university academic regulations, policies and procedures. Internal examiners for MPhil, PhD, MD(Res) or EngD degrees must meet the following criteria:

- a. must have supervised at least one Imperial PhD, MD(Res) or EngD student to successful completion at the university;
 - b. must have acted as an assessor for a successful Imperial MPhil to PhD transfer, Early Stage Assessment (ESA) or Late Stage Review (LSR), normally on at least three occasions; and
 - c. should normally have acted as an examiner for a research degree final examination at Imperial. Where an individual does not have such experience at Imperial, they may be appointed subject to a briefing on university regulations and examination procedures by the Director of Postgraduate Studies.
7. An individual with no prior experience of acting as an examiner for a research degree final examination at Imperial or elsewhere, may be considered as an internal examiner subject to the appointment of a second internal examiner who fulfils the criteria for appointment. In such cases, both internal examiners are expected to fully engage in the examination process. Departments must brief the second internal examiner on their responsibilities and the expectations of the role.
8. Lecturers and Senior Research Fellows must have successfully completed their probation period, including completion of the mandatory training course Fundamentals of Supervising PhD Students and/or any prescribed faculty courses. Senior Lecturers, Readers, Professors and Principal Research Fellows joining the university must have attended an induction covering teaching practice, research student supervision, the conduct of university examinations, applicable regulations, and pastoral care.

External Examiners

9. The external examiner should be a recognised expert of international standing, normally with experience of examining a research degree student at a leading university. They should normally hold the title of Reader or Professor (or an equivalent position in an overseas university or from outside the higher education sector) and their primary role is to provide subject-specific expertise.
10. External examiners may be drawn from academia, industry or other professions. It is the responsibility of departments to ensure that proposed examiners fulfil the criteria set out in this document.

Restrictions on Appointment

11. Visiting and Honorary academic and research staff may not be appointed as internal or external examiners for research degree examinations.
12. The following individuals may not be appointed to examine a research candidate:
- a. the candidate's supervisor(s);
 - b. the candidate's mentor;
 - c. anyone who has played a significant advisory role in the candidate's research; or

- d. anyone who has closely collaborated with the supervisor(s) (see paragraph 15).
13. An individual should not normally be appointed as an external examiner if they:
- a. have previously been involved in the supervision or assessment of the student in question;
 - b. were previously a member of the same research group as the student in question;
 - c. are a former member of university staff, except where a period of five years has passed and subject to 13a or b above
 - d. are a former student of the university, except where a period of five years has passed and subject to 13a or b above; or
 - e. have previously held an Honorary or Visiting appointment with the university, except where a period of five years has passed and subject to 13a or b above.

Potential Conflicts of Interest and Declaration Requirements

14. In proposing examiners, supervisors must be mindful of all connections between candidate, supervisors, mentors and proposed examiners. Such connections may be family or personal, professional or academic. Examples include co-publication, joint holding of grants, joint research activity, shared supervision of research degree students, or close research group affiliations.
15. In determining whether a proposed examiner has ‘closely collaborated’ with the supervisor(s), consideration should be given to the nature, extent, and recency of the relationship, and whether it could reasonably be perceived to compromise, or give rise to a perception of compromising, the examiner’s independence. Supervisors must declare any such connections in the examiner nomination form and to explain why each examiner is appropriate for their role, including why the proposed combination of examiners is appropriate.
16. An individual who has acted as an assessor for a candidate’s Early Stage Assessment (ESA) or Late Stage Review (LSR) is not precluded from acting as an examiner for the final examination (subject to the provisions of paragraph 13). Any such involvement must be declared, and a clear rationale provided, in the nomination form.

Approval and Appointment Process

17. The Director of Postgraduate Studies (or nominee) is responsible for approving the supervisor’s proposed examiners on behalf of the department prior to submission to the Assessment Records Team in Registry.
18. Upon receipt of the approved nomination form, the Assessment Records Team in Registry will normally review and confirm the appointment of examiners. Following confirmation, a formal invitation will be issued to the examiners on behalf of the university. As part of this process, examiners will be required to confirm that they have no connections with the candidate that would render their appointment inappropriate.
19. Where questions regarding the eligibility of one or more proposed examiners are identified during the review of nominations by the Assessment Records Team in Registry, the nomination may be

referred to one of the Early Career Researcher Institute's (ECRI) Deputy Directors (Academic) for advice or confirmation.

20. Where a department requests to appoint more than two examiners for a candidate for reasons other than to meet the minimum examining experience criteria outlined in point 5, the nominations shall be referred by the Assessment Records Team in Registry to one of the ECRI Deputy Directors (Academic) for consideration and approval.
21. Where a candidate's thesis is referred for re-submission, the same examiners are normally expected to examine the revised thesis. Any request to change one or more of the examiners upon re-submission of the thesis for examination shall be referred by the Assessment Records Team in Registry to one of the ECRI Deputy Directors (Academic) for approval.

Additional Provisions

22. Where a department wishes to propose an examiner from outside the UK, they should consider the environmental impact of examiner travel, and it is expected that the viva voce examination will be arranged to minimise costs to the university associated with overseas examiner travel. A remote or hybrid viva may be appropriate in some cases in accordance with the [Policy on the modality of research degree final thesis vivas](#).
23. In proposing an external examiner, the department agrees to cover any expense costs exceeding the maximum amount provided by Registry.
24. Departments should avoid the repeated or excessive use of individual examiners in order to maintain the independence of the examination process and to preserve the externality of academic judgement.
25. The university will retain a record of all nominations referred to the Early Career Researcher Institute for review. Information relating to referred nominations will be reported to the Postgraduate Research Quality Committee (PRQC) on an annual basis.

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