

Postgraduate Research Examining Team: Guidance for Faculties

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The expectations of the University of Southampton with regard to examiners are set out in paragraph 94 of the [Code of Practice for Research Degree Candidature and Supervision](#):
- The research student will normally be examined by an external and an internal examiner; in exceptional circumstances, one additional external examiner may be appointed.
 - Research students who are members of staff of the University of Southampton should have two external examiners and an internal examiner appointed.
 - Other researchers who have had any co-authoring or collaborative involvement in the research student's work, or whose own work is the focus of the research project such that there would be a conflict of interest or potential lack of objectivity, may not be appointed as internal or external examiners.
 - One examiner, either the internal or the external, may be drawn from the confirmation panel or committee (e.g. an internal member of staff who acted in the role of independent 'assessor' or an external 'assessor' if used) provided that they have had no further material contact with the research project since the confirmation, and that the other examiner is entirely new to the project.
 - Examiners, both internal and external, should have sufficient experience and appropriate subject expertise to examine effectively. They should also be sensitive to, and take into account in the examining process, reasonable adjustments, equality and diversity.
 - Collectively, the examiners should have acted as examiner for at least three doctoral examinations and be familiar with examination practice and standards in the UK. As an example, if the external examiner possesses subject expertise but limited UK examining experience, this may be compensated for by a suitably UK-experienced internal examiner. The examining team should have sufficient familiarity with examining procedures generally, and with the requirements of British postgraduate research qualifications.
- 1.2 A candidate for research degrees which contain a significant taught element (e.g.: professional doctorates or iPhDs) will require separate examiners for the taught and research components. An external examiner should be appointed for the taught element in accordance with the University's [policies and procedures regarding the appointment, role and responsibilities of external examiners for taught programmes](#). This examiner may serve as an external examiner for a cohort of students for the taught component. **An individual student should not be examined in their taught and research component by the same external examiner.**
- 1.3 The examination of a resubmitted thesis is a continuation of the original examination, and the original examining team should remain in place.

2. Internal Examiners

- 2.1 Paragraph 55 of the [Regulations for Research Degrees](#) and paragraph 94 of the [Code of Practice for Research Degree Candidature and Supervision](#) set out the expectation that:
- No member of the supervisory team may be appointed as an internal examiner; nor may they take part in the judgement of the thesis under consideration in any other way.
 - Members of staff who have had pastoral involvement with the research student such that objectivity would potentially be affected may also not be appointed to the examining team.

3. External Examiners

3.1 Paragraphs 95 and 96 of the [Code of Practice for Research Degree Candidature and Supervision](#) set out the eligibility criteria for the nomination and appointment of external examiners. The following gives additional guidance for Schools, but it is important that they are read in conjunction with Paragraphs 95 and 96.

- External examiners should normally hold academic posts in another higher education institution. Nominations for examiners who do not hold such positions should be accompanied by a statement outlining their suitability and ability to examine, and there should be sufficient evidence of their research experience and expertise in the subject.
- Internal examiners will of course normally satisfy this criterion, but any nominations for staff who are retired, or who are academically-related and ineligible to supervise, should have the same supporting information. It is also important to verify that the examining team has sufficient familiarity with examining procedures generally, and with the requirements of the British MPhil/PhD. If the nominated examiner holds an honorary University title, this should be stated.
- External examiners would not normally be expected to be reappointed if they have examined a research student at the University of Southampton within the last two years. The member of staff acting as the co-ordinating supervisor should check with their Faculty Graduate School Office for this information in relation to the proposed external examiner. In exceptional circumstances (for example, where it is not possible to find elsewhere an examiner with a particular area of expertise), a reappointment within two years may be permissible at the discretion of the Faculty Director of the Graduate School.
- External examiners should be independent, and no one should be nominated who has had any formal academic contact with the research student during the period of research candidature. An interval of at least three years should elapse before a former member of staff or graduate of the University of Southampton becomes eligible to act as an external examiner. If the research project has involved collaboration with an outside body, the nominee should also be independent of that body. It is also desirable that this independence is preserved, and externals are not individuals with close association with the School concerned. Although reciprocity may be more difficult to avoid than for taught programmes, examiners should not normally be appointed from Schools at other institutions where University of Southampton members of staff have recently examined for the same subject if at all possible.

3.2 The process of formal appointment requires approval by the Faculty Director of the Graduate School (or a single, named, deputy) using the *Appointment of Examiners for a Postgraduate Research Degree: Nomination Form*.

It is the responsibility of the member of staff acting as the co-ordinating supervisor to complete the nomination form,

4. External Examiners' Fees

4.1 The external examiner's fee for postgraduate research programmes and higher doctorates was increased by AQSC in April 2012 to take effect from August 2012. The fees are as follows:

PhD	£165
MPhil	£120
DM/MS	£140
Higher Doctorate	£175

4.2 AQSC also agreed that there should be provision for Schools to pay an additional fee to an external examiner where this is appropriate given the nature of the work to be examined and where there is a need to secure a particular external from a specialist field who is unlikely to accept the appointment on the standard rate. The rate of any additional fee is at the discretion of the School.

4.3 AQSC set the fee for the external examination of a resubmitted thesis as follows:

Re-examination of thesis, with <i>viva voce</i>	Full fee payable
Re-examination of thesis, without <i>viva voce</i>	£120 (equivalent to MPhil rate) or half the initial fee, if this would be higher than £120, in cases where an additional fee is initially paid

4.4 Following approval of the nominees, the Faculty Graduate School Office will issue a letter of appointment to the External Examiner, including the *Bank Information (AP07) form* and the *External Examiner (PGR and PGT only) Claim for Fees and Expenses (AP08) form*, both of which can be downloaded from the [Finance Intranet](#).

4.5 To make a claim for fees and expenses, the External Examiner will need to complete the *Bank Information (AP07) form* and the *External Examiner (PGR and PGT only) Claim for Fees and Expenses (AP08) form*. Both forms should be returned to the Faculty Graduate School Office following the *viva voce*.

4.6 The Faculty Graduate School Office will check that

- the *Bank Information (AP07) form* has been fully completed;
- the claim detailed on the *External Examiner (PGR and PGT only) Claim for Fees and Expenses (AP08) form* has been calculated correctly

4.7 The Faculty Graduate School Office will then arrange for the budget holder declaration to be completed and pass to the Faculty Finance Team for financial approval.

4.8 Once all declarations are complete, both forms can be submitted to Accounts Payable to process for payment.

5. Independent Chair

5.1 In certain circumstances, an Independent Chair may be required at a *viva voce*.

5.2 The role of Independent Chair should be filled by a senior academic member of staff with substantial experience in supervising research students.

5.3 An Independent Chair must be appointed by the Faculty:

- in response to any request from the Faculty Graduate School Committee, an examiner, a member of the supervisory team, or the research student;
- where the examining team is inexperienced at examining under the UK system (when one examiner has never conducted a *viva voce* before);
- where the internal examiner holds a substantive post within University Hospitals Southampton NHS Foundation Trust or associated NHS organisation, or is a member of staff employed at the Natural Environmental Research Council (NERC) or the National Oceanography Centre (NOC), or has a similar joint employment status between the University of Southampton and its partners;
- where there have been substantial difficulties with research student progress;
- where the *viva voce* is taking place with the assistance of video conferencing and/or other suitable technologically-based communication;
- where the research student is undertaking a second *viva voce* either with or without resubmission of the thesis.

5.4 The role of the Independent Chair is to monitor good practice within the examination and to ensure that the examination is conducted according to the University's regulations; to ensure that the research student is treated fairly and appropriately; to ensure that the outcome of the

examination is fair and appropriate given the research student's performance; to provide a report after the *viva voce* to the Faculty Director of the Graduate School. The Independent Chair is not provided with a copy of the thesis and does not take any part in its judgement.

6. Appointment Process

- 6.1 It is the responsibility of the member of the supervisory team acting as co-ordinating supervisor to ensure that the arrangements for the examination are made.
- 6.2 Once completed, the *Nomination Form for Appointment of Examiners for a Postgraduate Research Degree* should be submitted to the Faculty Graduate School Office.
- 6.3 In order to ensure externality and quality assurance of choices made and justifications provided, examiners' nomination forms should be approved at Faculty level by the Faculty Director of the Graduate School (or a single, named, nominee).

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