

**Nomination of Examiners & Independent Chairs for Postgraduate Research  
Degree Examinations Policy**

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**Research Degrees and Researcher Development  
Directorate of Research and Business Engagement**

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## **1. Introduction**

1.1 The following policy relates to the nomination of examiners and independent chairs for the examination of postgraduate research degrees at The University of Manchester and applies to the following degrees:

- Master's level research degrees: Master of Science (MSc) by Research; Master of Enterprise (MEnt); Master of Philosophy (MPhil).
- Doctoral degrees: Doctor of Philosophy (PhD); Doctor of Medicine (MD), Doctor of Business Administration (DBA), Professional, Engineering and Enterprise Doctorate Degrees

1.2 This policy does not apply to PhD by Published Work or Higher Doctorates for which specific guidance exists at <http://www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/researchoffice/graduate/ordinancesandregulations>

1.3 This policy is intended for use by academic and administrative staff and full-time and part-time postgraduate research students of the degrees specified in section 1.1.

1.4 Any deviation from this policy will only be considered in the most exceptional circumstances and must be agreed in writing with the candidate before the examination takes place. Enquiries should initially be directed to the appropriate Graduate Office in the School, and then to the Faculty Graduate Office and Faculty Associate Dean for Postgraduate Research where appropriate. If necessary, cases may be referred to the Associate Vice-President for Graduate Education

Enquiries to the Associate Vice-President for Graduate Education should be directed to the Graduate Education Team based in the University's Research Office. Contact details for the Graduate Education Team and Faculty Graduate Offices can be found at the following link: <http://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/services/rbess/graduate/contacts/>

1.5 This policy should be referred to along with the relevant general University policy relating to the examination of postgraduate research degrees:

- *Examination of Doctoral Degrees Policy*
- *Examination of Master of Philosophy (MPhil) Degrees Policy*

Policy on the examination of the master's level postgraduate research degrees of Master of Science (MSc) by Research and Master of Enterprise (MEnt) is detailed in the individual Ordinances and Regulations for the relevant degree, available at

<http://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/services/rbess/graduate/ordinancesandregulations/>

## **2. The examining committee**

2.1 The examining committee for a postgraduate research degree must comprise at least an internal examiner and an external examiner, except in the circumstances outlined in this policy. An independent chair may also be present under the circumstances detailed in this policy.

## **3. Nomination of examiners**

3.1 The supervisor is required to submit the *Nomination of Examiners Form* in the University's progression monitoring system with details of the nominated examiners **within ten working days** of the submission of the Notice of Submission form by the student. The *Nomination of Examiners Form* will subsequently be formally approved by the appropriate PGR Director/PG Tutor, or equivalent. PGR Directors/PG Tutors are required to check that the nominations comply with the criteria set out in this policy before giving approval.

3.2 Before making a formal nomination, supervisors are required to contact the examiners to ensure that they are willing and available to examine the degree. As part of this communication the supervisor may request additional material (e.g. CV) from the examiner to inform the nomination of examiners process.

- 3.3 In consultation with the candidate, supervisors should verify that the proposed examiners have not had a significant input into the project, a significant personal, financial or professional relationship with the candidate, or that there is no other good reason to doubt the suitability of the recommendation.

#### **4. Candidate involvement in examiner and independent chair nomination**

- 4.1 The supervisor must discuss their nominations with the candidate, prior to completing the *Nomination of Examiners Form*, as part of the examination process. Candidates have the right to contest the nomination of an examiner or independent chair for reasons that can be justified, and should approach the appropriate School or Faculty Graduate Office within one working week of receiving the nomination with their concerns in the first instance. If after discussions with School or Faculty staff the disagreement remains unresolved, the candidate must submit a written statement giving reasons for the disagreement to be considered by the appropriate School or Faculty postgraduate research degrees committee.

The following may be considered appropriate reasons:

- i. the proposed examiner or independent chair has had significant involvement in the project or with the candidate;
  - ii. the candidate has reason to believe, supported by evidence, that the proposed examiner or independent chair will not conduct the examination fairly;
  - iii. the proposed examiner or independent chair is not academically suitable to conduct the examination;
  - iv. the proposed examiner or independent chair does not meet the appointment criteria listed in Section 6, 7 and 8 of this policy
- 4.2 The School or Faculty postgraduate research degrees committee can agree one of the following outcomes once they have considered the written statement from the student.
- i. If the committee agrees that there are reasonable concerns about the appointment of the

examiner/independent chair as stated in the written statement from the student, a new examiner/independent chair will be nominated by the Supervisor. Only the role contested by the student will be re-nominated. The other members of the examination committee will remain the same.

- ii. If the committee does not agree with the concerns outlined in the written statement from the student the nominated examinations committee will remain and a date will be set for the viva examination. The student can appeal this decision once by submitting their concerns to the Faculty Graduate Office. The Faculty Associate Dean for Postgraduate Research (or their nominee) will reconsider the submitted written statement and a formal decision will be communicated to the student.
- iii. The student should be informed of the outcome of the committee decision as soon as reasonably possible by the Faculty/School Graduate Office.

## **5. General information on examiner criteria**

- 5.1 Supervisors must refer to the criteria detailed in this policy when nominating examiners. There may be occasions when the proposed examiner does not meet all the criteria outlined in the policy; for example, in a specialist subject area where there is only a small pool of experts. In such cases approval to exceptionally appoint the examiner must be sought by the supervisor from the appropriate School or Faculty postgraduate research degrees committee.
- 5.2 Regular pairings of internal and external examiners should be avoided.

## **6. Criteria for nominating external examiners**

### **6.1 External examiner essential criteria**

The **external** examiner must:

- i. have expertise in the area of work to be examined;

- ii. be experienced in research, and have recently published, or have equivalent professional experience;
- iii. normally have been an examiner for a postgraduate research degree or have had experience of the postgraduate research degree examination process - external examiners examining for the first time should have experience of supervising a research student and examining as an internal examiner;
- iv. hold a postgraduate research degree at the level he/she is examining, or have equivalent professional experience;
- v. hold/have held an appointment within the university system, although it is permissible to appoint an appropriate person from outside the university sector; e.g., a senior industrial scientist or professional practitioner who is aware of the standards required.

## **6.2 External examiner restrictions**

The **external** examiner must not:

- i. have had any collaboration with the candidate or have given any substantive advice to the candidate on his/her research (except in the case of a resubmitted thesis);
- ii. be either a current or former member of staff of The University of Manchester or its affiliated colleges unless at least five years have elapsed since he/she relinquished the post;
- iii. be a former higher degree student of The University of Manchester or its affiliated colleges unless at least six years have elapsed since the degree was conferred;
- iv. normally be invited on a regular basis (more than once a year) to examine postgraduate research degrees at The University of Manchester.

## **6.3 Further regulations relating to external examiners**

- i. It is the responsibility of the external examiner to disclose any significant personal, financial or professional relationship with the candidate.
- ii. External examiners who have a close personal or professional relationship with the candidate's supervisor



should be avoided to prevent a potential conflict of interest.

- iii. Supervisors should not normally use the same external examiners for their students within a three-year period, except with the express permission of the appropriate School or Faculty Graduate Office.
- iv. Retired academic members of staff fulfilling all other criteria may be selected as long as they are still active in research.
- v. Visiting academic members of staff may act as external examiners where they fulfil all of the other criteria for appointment.
- vi. In the case of candidates who are members of the academic staff of the University (grade of Lecturer and its equivalent or above) two external examiners must normally be appointed. In cases where it proves difficult to appoint an additional external examiner, an internal examiner may be appointed with the permission of the Faculty Associate Dean for Postgraduate Research.
- vii. If the candidate is a Clinical Research Fellow, two external examiners are not required, and the standard examining committee of an internal and external examiner should be appointed as normal.
- viii. For the degree of Doctor of Engineering (EngD), there should normally be two external examiners; one with an academic background and one with an industrial background. The industrial external examiner should be of sufficient seniority and experience to be able to assess the commercial or applied aspects of the research as reported in the thesis. Commercial confidentiality may restrict the choice of examiner; therefore it may be acceptable for the examiner to be an employee of the sponsoring company. However, the examiner must be sufficiently removed from the project to be genuinely independent and must have had no involvement in the conduct or planning of the research project.

- ix. Where two external examiners are appointed, an appropriate person from the School/Division must be nominated to act as the host during their visit to the University.
- x. Where there are two external examiners and no internal examiner, an independent chair must be appointed to oversee the examination (see section 8).

All external examiners of any nationality must have the [right to work \(RTW\) in the UK](#). It is the School's responsibility to check that the University is provided with the relevant documentation from the external regarding their RTW status.

- xi. Consideration should always be given to the availability of external examiners within the UK. However, where it is necessary to appoint an examiner outside of the UK as they are the most appropriate examiner for the field of research, the supervisor must seek approval from the PGR Director/Tutor before they submit the Nomination of Examiners form.

## **7. Criteria for nominating internal examiners**

### **7.1 Internal examiner essential criteria**

The **internal** examiner must:

- i. have expertise in the area of work to be examined;
- ii. be experienced in research, and have recently published, or have equivalent professional experience;
- iii. hold an academic award at the level he/she is examining or have equivalent professional experience;
- iv. be familiar with University processes and procedures and specifically have knowledge of University regulations for the degree under examination and of University examinations policy;
- v. be a member of the academic staff of The University of Manchester or its affiliated colleges.

In addition, Schools should ensure that all individuals appointed as internal examiners have received adequate training and guidance. Internal examiners should have:

- vi. received an appropriate induction in respect of the postgraduate examination standards of the University, and received a copy of the University regulations for the degree under examination and the University [‘Examination of doctoral degrees policy’](#);
- vii. attended any relevant School/Faculty internal examiner training session/s;
- viii. received information about other relevant administrative procedures relating to examinations; e.g., guidance on handling cases of academic malpractice.

## **7.2 Internal examiner restrictions**

The **internal** examiner must not:

- i. be the candidate’s main supervisor or co-supervisor
- ii. be a candidate for the degree;
- iii. be a visiting member of staff;
- iv. have had significant involvement in the project or with the candidate;
- v. have been appointed more than once as a committee member as part of the student’s end of year assessments in any year of their programme;
- vi. have been awarded their PhD from Manchester within the last three years;
- vii. be appointed as the external examiner.

In some cases, if they have not had any academic involvement with the candidate’s project, it may be appropriate to appoint the student’s advisor as an internal examiner. In such cases approval to exceptionally appoint the advisor must be sought by the supervisor from the appropriate PGR Director/PG Tutor.

In exceptional circumstances, a supervisor may apply to the relevant Faculty/School PGR committee to request approval to appoint an internal examiner where they have been involved with a candidate’s end of year assessments, more than once during their programme.

### **7.3 Further regulations relating to internal examiners**

- i. In exceptional cases, retired academic members of staff fulfilling all other criteria may be selected as internal examiners as long as they are still active in research and have substantial involvement with the University. An independent chair should also be appointed.
- ii. Honorary members of academic staff at The University of Manchester may be appointed as internal examiners where they fulfil all of the other criteria for appointment. An independent chair should also be appointed
- iii. An internal examiner inexperienced in the University of Manchester postgraduate research degree examination process should normally have an independent chair present who is not required to have expertise in the work to be examined but is experienced in the examination process.
- iv. An internal examiner must have been through the examination process at least once to be considered an 'experienced' examiner.
- v. Where there is no appropriate internal examiner, two external examiners and an independent chair must be appointed.

### **7.4 Duties of an internal examiner**

- i. To be involved with all elements of the examination process.
- ii. To assess the version of the thesis/documents provided via the appropriate Faculty/School Graduate Office.
- iii. To read the thesis/documents and provide a detailed Pre-oral Examination Report before discussing with the other examiners.
- iv. To make the practical arrangements for the oral examination and confirm the date/time etc. in the University's progression monitoring system

- v. To manage all required tasks of the examination processes through the University's progression monitoring system within the required timeframes.
- vi. To attend any appropriate Faculty/School postgraduate research degrees committee when required
- vii. To manage the submission and approval of the Joint Examiners' Report Form.

## **8. The independent chair**

### **8.1 Circumstances when an independent chair must be appointed**

- i. In examinations where there are two external examiners and no internal examiner.
- ii. At the request of the internal and/or external examiner or supervisor if they anticipate difficulties with the examination or if they simply require the presence of a chair to assist them through the process.
- iii. When a School or Faculty deems that an independent authority is needed in the examination process to ensure that the examination is fair and conducted in accordance with University policy and regulations (see section 7.3). This includes examination by video link.
- iv. When the School or Faculty recognises there are issues relating to the conduct of the research and/or supervision or aspects of the thesis that require the presence of an experienced academic to oversee the process.
- v. An experienced independent Chair will be appointed when a retired academic or inexperienced member of staff is examining. The candidate does not have any say in the decision to include an independent chair in the examination panel. However, the candidate and all parties involved with the examination process should be informed of the appointment of the independent chair and their role in the process (see 4.1 in relation to involvement in the nomination of the independent chair).

## **8.2 Appointment criteria for an independent chair**

The independent chair must normally:

- i. be an academic member of staff at the University of Manchester at the grade of Senior Lecturer or its equivalent or above;
- ii. be familiar with University processes and procedures and specifically have knowledge of University regulations for the degree under examination and of the University examinations policy for postgraduate research degrees;
- iii. have substantial previous experience as an examiner of the postgraduate research degree oral examination;
- iv. have experience in the supervision of students studying for the degree being examined;
- v. have previous experience of chairing meetings.

The independent chair must not:

- i. be a member of the candidate's supervisory team, or have played any significant part in the project or the assessment of the candidate (e.g., in formal progress reviews).

## **8.3 Duties of an independent chair**

- i. To attend the pre-oral meeting with the examiners and assist the examiners in arranging the details for the oral examination (see sections 15 of the relevant University policy; *Examination of Doctoral Degrees Policy* OR *Examination of Master of Philosophy (MPhil) Degrees Policy* for further information).
- ii. To oversee the oral examination. Explicitly to: introduce the examiners and candidate; outline the procedure for the examination and its key purposes; ensure that all key items are addressed and the candidate is given the

opportunity to respond to all questions asked by the examiners; ensure that the examination is conducted fairly and in accordance with University regulations and policy (see section 17 of the relevant University policy: *Examination of Doctoral Degrees Policy* OR *Examination of Master of Philosophy (MPhil) Degrees Policy* for further guidance on conduct of the oral examination).

- iii. To ensure that the supervisor, if present, and parties other than the candidate and examiners do not contribute to the final decision a decision agree in writing to maintain confidentiality in respect of the content of the examination.
- iv. At the end of the oral examination, ensure that actions required of the candidate and the examiners are clear and understood by all parties.
- v. To request that examiners complete and submit the relevant reports via the internal examiner or independent chair in the University's progression monitoring system within five working days of the oral examination.
- vi. To request that any minor corrections are detailed in the *Joint Examiners' Report Form* by one of the examiners and ensure the report is submitted via the internal examiner or independent chair in the University's progression monitoring system within five working days of the oral examination. (See section 22.1.2 of the relevant University policy: *Examination of Doctoral Degrees Policy* OR *Examination of Master of Philosophy (MPhil) Degrees Policy* for further guidance.)
- vii. If a referral is recommended, to request that the examiners complete a statement as part of the *Examiner's Report Form* and submit the form via the internal examiner or independent chair in the University's progression monitoring system within five working days of the oral examination. (See section 23 of the relevant University policy: *Examination of Doctoral Degrees Policy* OR *Examination of Master of Philosophy (MPhil) Degrees Policy* for further guidance.)

- vi. To advise examiners, the candidate and other parties involved in the examination on University policy and regulations.
- vii. Where an independent chair is appointed because the internal examiner is inexperienced in the University of Manchester postgraduate research degree examination process, the independent chair is responsible for guiding the examiner through the process.
- viii. Where an independent chair is appointed because there are two external examiners, the independent chair is responsible for carrying out the practical tasks associated with the examination process which would normally be undertaken by the internal examiner.

#### **8.4 Additional information relating to independent chairs**

- i. The independent chair is not required to have any knowledge of the thesis or the discipline area.
- ii. The independent chair can request an electronic copy of the thesis from the appropriate Faculty/School Graduate Office. He/she is not expected to read the thesis in detail.
- iii. The independent chair must attend the pre-oral meeting and have access to pre-oral report forms.
- iv. The independent chair is present to ensure quality assurance of examination procedures and should not be involved in or contribute to the assessment of the thesis.



**9. APPENDIX 1: Faculty and central Graduate Office contact details**

NB: queries should be directed to the appropriate School Office within the relevant Faculty in the first instance. For School Graduate Office contact details, contact the Faculty Graduate Office or consult the University website: <http://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/services/rbess/graduate/contacts/>

## 10. APPENDIX 2: Documents relating to postgraduate research degree examination

### FORMS:

Form	Completed by	Location of form
Notice of submission form	Candidate	Online monitoring system
Nomination of Examiners form	Supervisor	Online monitoring system
Oral details form	Internal Examiner	Online monitoring system
Pre-Oral Examination Form	Each Examiner	Online monitoring system
Joint Examiners Report Form	Jointly by both/ all examiners	Online monitoring system

### POLICY & GUIDANCE

- *Presentation of Theses Policy*
- *Academic Malpractice: Guidelines on the Handling of Cases*
- *Nomination of Examiners & Independent Chairs for Postgraduate Research Degree Examinations Policy*
- *Examination of Doctoral Degrees Policy*
- *Examination of Master of Philosophy (MPhil) Degrees Policy*
- *Resubmission and Re-examination of Postgraduate Research Degrees Policy*
- *Conducting Oral Examinations by Video Link Policy*
- *Posthumous Award of Postgraduate Research Degrees Policy*

Policy/guidance is available from the appropriate School or Faculty graduate office or from the central graduate education web pages at <http://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/services/rbess/graduate/code/>

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