

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

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Research Office Graduate Education Team

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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); Master of Surgery (ChM); Doctor of Medicine (MD).
- Professional, Engineering and Enterprise Doctorate degrees: Doctor of Engineering (EngD); Doctor of Enterprise (EntD); Doctor of Business Administration (DBA); Doctor of Clinical Psychology (ClinPsyD); Doctor of Counselling (DCouns); Doctor in Education (EdD); Doctor of Educational Psychology (DEdPsy); Doctor in Educational and Child Psychology (DEdChPsy); Doctor of Practical Theology (DPT); Professional Doctorate in Applied Theatre (PDAT).

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 Graduate Education, where appropriate. If necessary, cases may be referred to the Associate Vice-President for Graduate Education and/or the Graduate Education Group.

Enquiries to the Associate Vice-President for Graduate Education and/or the Graduate Education Group 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 in appendix one.

1.6 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.campus.manchester.ac.uk/researchoffice/graduate/ordinancesandregulations/>.

2. The examining panel

- 2.1 The examining panel 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 section 8.

3. Nomination of examiners

- 3.1 The supervisor is required to submit a completed *Nomination of Examiners Form* to the appropriate School or Faculty graduate office with details of the nominated examiners **within ten working days** of the request from the graduate office. The nomination of examiners will subsequently be formally approved by the appropriate School or Faculty postgraduate research degrees panel, or equivalent. Panels 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.
- 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 nomination

- 4.1 The supervisor must discuss their nominations with the candidate as part of the examination process. Candidates have the right to contest the nomination of an examiner for reasons that can be justified, and should approach the appropriate School or Faculty graduate office 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 panel.

The following may be considered appropriate reasons:

- i. the proposed examiner 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 will not conduct the examination fairly;

- iii. the proposed examiner is not academically suitable to conduct the examination;
- iv. the proposed examiner does not meet the appointment criteria listed in University policy.

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 from the appropriate School or Faculty postgraduate research degrees panel. Cases should be referred to the appropriate School or Faculty graduate office in the first instance.
- 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; eg, 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 six 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 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 Graduate Education.
- vii. If the candidate is a Clinical Research Fellow, two external examiners are not required, and the standard examining panel 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).

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 University examinations policy;
- vii. attended the relevant School/Faculty internal examiner training session/s;
- viii. received information about other relevant administrative procedures relating to examinations; eg, guidance on handling cases of academic malpractice.

7.2 Internal examiner restrictions

The **internal** examiner must not:

- i. be the candidate's supervisor or a member of the supervisory team;
- ii. be a candidate for the degree;
- iii. be a visiting member of staff.

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.
- ii. Honorary members of staff based at The University of Manchester may be appointed as internal examiners where they fulfil all of the other criteria for appointment.
- iii. An internal examiner inexperienced in the postgraduate research degree examination process should normally act initially as a co-examiner. Under these circumstances, an additional experienced internal examiner must be appointed who is not required to have expertise in the work to be examined.
- iv. In exceptional cases where the internal examiner does not meet the criteria outlined in this policy, two external examiners and an independent chair must be appointed.

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. For instance; for a Doctor of Engineering (EngD) examination or in situations where an internal examiner who meets all of the appointment criteria has not been found.
- ii. At the request of the internal and/or external examiner 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.
- 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.

A senior academic member of staff in the School or Faculty (eg: chair of School or Faculty postgraduate research degrees panel; PGR Director; Head of School), is responsible for identifying whether or not an independent chair is required and, if required, for selecting a suitable individual under the criteria listed in section 8.2. The candidate does not have any say in the decision to involve an independent chair nor in the selection of the individual.

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 University examinations policy;
- iii. have substantial previous experience of the postgraduate research degree oral examination as an examiner;
- 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:

- vi. be the candidate's supervisor, a member of the supervisory team or have played any significant part in the project or the assessment of the candidate (eg, 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 setting an agenda for the oral examination (see sections 15 and 16 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 on the agenda 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 18 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 only act as observers and agree in writing to maintain confidentiality in respect of the content of the examination.

- iv. At the end of the oral examination, to ensure that actions required of the candidate and the examiners are clear and understood by all parties.
- v. To request that examiners complete and return the relevant written reports to the appropriate School or Faculty graduate office within three working days of the oral examination.
- vii. To request that any minor corrections are detailed in the joint *Examiners' Report Form* (or attached to the report form on separate sheets) by one of the examiners and ensure the report is returned to the appropriate School or Faculty graduate office within three working days of the oral examination. (See section 23.1.2 of the relevant University policy: *Examination of Doctoral Degrees Policy* OR *Examination of Master of Philosophy (MPhil) Degrees Policy* for further guidance.)
- viii. If a referral is recommended, to request that the examiners complete a separate statement and submit it to the appropriate School or Faculty graduate office within three working days of the oral examination. (See section 24 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.

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 receives a copy of the thesis for information purposes only. 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.manchester.ac.uk/aboutus/structure/academic/>

Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences

Graduate Administrator
Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences
C4, Sackville Street Building
The University of Manchester Sackville Street
Manchester M60 1QD
Tel 0161 306 9191

Faculty of Humanities

Senior Postgraduate Administrator
Faculty of Humanities
Devonshire House
The University of Manchester
Oxford Road
Manchester M13 9PL
Tel: 0161 306 1114/0161 275 0287

Faculty of Life Sciences

Head of Postgraduate Research Services
Faculty of Life Sciences
1.21 Simon Building
Brunswick Street
The University of Manchester
Oxford Road
Manchester M13 9PL
Tel: 0161 275 5444

Faculty of Medical and Human Sciences

Graduate Education Manager
Faculty of Medical and Human Sciences
3rd Floor, Simon Building
Brunswick Street
The University of Manchester
Oxford Road
Manchester M13 9PL
Tel: 0161 275 5024

Central Graduate Office

Graduate Education Team
Research Office
The University of Manchester
2nd Floor, Christie Building
Oxford Road
Manchester M13 9PL
Tel: 0161 275 8790

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

FORMS

	To be completed by:
<i>Notice of Submission Form</i>	Candidate (& signed by supervisor)
<i>Nomination of Examiners Form</i>	Supervisor
<i>Pre-Oral Examination Form</i>	Each examiner
<i>Joint Examiners Report Form</i>	Jointly by both/all examiners

Forms are available from the appropriate School or Faculty graduate office.

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.campus.manchester.ac.uk/researchoffice/graduate/>