Nomination of Examiners and Independent Chairs for Postgraduate Research Degree Examinations Procedure

If you are reading a printed version of this document, you should check (https://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=7444) to ensure you have the most up to date version.

1. Introduction and Purpose

1.1. This procedure sets out requirements for the nomination of examiners and independent chairs for all postgraduate research degrees at the University of Manchester.

2. Scope and definitions

2.1 This procedure is applicable to University of Manchester staff, external examiners and all full-time and part-time postgraduate research students (PGRs) of all postgraduate research degrees except PhD by Published Work or Higher Doctorates for which specific guidance exists.

2.2 This document should be referred to along with the relevant degree Ordinances and Regulations and the relevant degree examination policy:

i. Examination of Doctoral Degrees Policy
ii. Examination of Master of Philosophy (MPhil) Degrees Policy
iii. Examination of Master of Science (Msc by Research) and Master of Enterprise (MEnt) Degrees Policy.

2.3 Any deviation from this procedure will only be considered in the most exceptional circumstances and prior approval / PGR agreement is required before the examination takes place.[1]

3. Roles and Responsibilities

3.1 It is the responsibility of University of Manchester staff, external examiners and PGRs to adhere to this procedure.

4. The Examining Committee

4.1 A postgraduate research degree examining committee includes either an internal and an external examiner, or two external examiners.

[1] Enquiries about deviation from this procedure should be directed to the appropriate PGR office who may, where necessary, consult with the Faculty Associate Dean for Postgraduate Research, the Associate Vice-President for Postgraduate Research and/or the Postgraduate Researchers Management Group (PRMG) via the Research Degrees and Researcher Development Team.

4.2 The PhD by Enterprise examination panel should include two external examiners—one who has academic expertise in the research area and another with proven entrepreneurial experience—as well as an internal examiner (see sections 8 and 9).

4.3 An independent chair may also be appointed under the circumstances detailed in this procedure.

5. Nomination of Examiners

5.1 The main 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 candidate. 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.

5.2 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.

5.3 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.

6. Candidate Involvement in Examiner / Independent Chair Selection

6.1 The supervisor must discuss their nominations with the candidate, prior to completing the Nomination of Examiners Form, as part of the examination process.

6.2 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 PGR Office within one working week of receiving the nomination with their concerns (retrospective challenges e.g. after the examination has taken place, will not be accepted).

6.3 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.

6.4 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 this procedure.

6.5 The School or Faculty postgraduate research degrees committee can agree one of the following outcomes once they have considered the written statement from the candidate:

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 candidate, a new examiner/independent chair will be nominated by the Supervisor. Only the role contested by the candidate 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 PGR the nominated examinations committee will remain and a date will be set for the oral examination. The candidate can appeal this decision once by submitting their concerns to the PGR 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 candidate.

iii. The candidate should be informed of the outcome of the committee decision as soon as reasonably possible by the PGR Office.

7. Postgraduate Research Degrees Examiner General Criteria

7.1 Supervisors must refer to the criteria detailed in this procedure when nominating examiners. There may be occasions when the proposed examiner does not meet all the criteria outlined in the procedure; 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.

7.2 Regular pairings of the same internal and external examiners should be avoided.

7.3 Supervisors should be mindful of the University's commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion when nominating examination panels.

8. External Examiner – Appointment Criteria / Restrictions / Regulations

8.1 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 they are examining, or have equivalent professional experience;
v. hold or have previously 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.

8.2 Schools should ensure that all individuals appointed as external examiners receive adequate guidance. External examiners should:

i. receive a copy of the University regulations for the degree under examination and the relevant University degree examination policy.
ii. receive information about other relevant administrative procedures relating to examinations; e.g., guidance on handling cases of academic malpractice.
iii. direct any questions they have about the guidance to the relevant PGR office prior to the examination.

8.3 The external examiner must not:

i. have collaborated with or have given any substantive advice to the candidate on work relating to the thesis to be examined (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 they relinquished the post;
iii. be a current visiting member of staff at the University of Manchester;
iv. 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;
v. normally be invited on a regular basis (more than once a year) to examine postgraduate research degrees at The University of Manchester.

8.4 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 PGRs within a three-year period, except with express permission obtained via the appropriate PGR Office.

iv. Retired academic members of staff fulfilling all other criteria may be selected as long as they are still active in research.

v. 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.

vi. 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.

vii. 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.

viii. For the PhD by Enterprise, the examination panel must include an additional external examiner with substantial entrepreneurial experience—holding a doctoral degree in a relevant discipline and a proven track record in innovation or research commercialisation—who is independent of the candidate, supervisory team, and University of Manchester, and able to assess the academic and practical merit of the business plan or enterprise component at doctoral level. Prior doctoral examination experience is desirable but not essential. This examiner does not need to be a practicing academic or researcher but must hold a doctoral level degree.

ix. Where two external examiners are appointed, an appropriate person from the School/Division/Department 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 and act as host (see section 10).

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.

xii. 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.

xiii. Fee levels for external examiners are determined by the University from year to year and are specified in the examiner's offer letter. Fees are normally paid on receipt of examiners reports at the appropriate PGR office.

xiv. Expenses may be claimed using the official University fees and expenses form provided to the examiner from the appropriate PGR office, which should be completed and returned as soon as possible after the oral examination. Expenses must be normally claimed within two months of the expenditure being incurred.

xv. Enquiries about examiner fees and expenses should be directed to the appropriate PGR office.

9. Internal Examiner – Appointment Criteria / Restrictions / Regulations

9.1 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 they are 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.

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

i. 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 relevant University degree examination policy.

ii. attended any relevant School/Faculty internal examiner training sessions;

iii. received information about other relevant administrative procedures relating to examinations; e.g. guidance on handling cases of academic malpractice.

9.3 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 PGR's end of year assessments in any year of their programme (this applies to both Full-Time and Part-Time PGRs);
vi. have been awarded their PhD from Manchester within the last three years;
vii. be appointed as the external examiner.

9.4 Further regulations relating to internal examiners:

i. In some cases, if they have not had any academic involvement with the candidate's project, it may be appropriate to appoint the PGR'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.
ii. 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.
iii. 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.
iv. Honorary members of academic staff at the University of Manchester may be appointed as internal examiners, provided they meet all other eligibility criteria for appointment. In such cases, an independent chair must also be appointed (see Section 10).
v. 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.
vi. An internal examiner must have been through the examination process at least once to be considered an 'experienced' examiner.
vii. Where there is no appropriate internal examiner, two external examiners and an independent chair must be appointed.
viii. For the PhD by Enterprise, entrepreneurial experience is desirable for the internal examiner where available, such as experience of founding, leading or advising start-ups, or evaluating business plans. However, this is not a requirement for appointment.

ix.

9.5 Duties of an internal examiner:

i. To be involved with all elements of the examination process.[2]
ii. To assess the version of the thesis/dissertation provided via the appropriate PGR Office.
iii. To read the thesis/dissertation and provide a detailed Pre-oral Examination Report (if required) before discussing with the other examiners.
iv. To make the practical arrangements for the oral examination (if required) 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.

10. The Independent Chair - Circumstances / Appointment Criteria / Duties / Regulations

10.1 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
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, honorary member of staff or an 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.

10.2 An Independent chair must normally:

[2] In circumstances where an internal examiner is unable to see an examination through to the end (e.g. due to illness) the relevant PGR Office may refer the remaining stages of the process to the relevant PGR Director (or their delegate).

i. be an academic member of staff at the University of Manchester;
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 by oral examination;
iv. have experience in the supervision of PGRs studying for the degree being examined;
v. have previous experience of chairing meetings.

10.3 An 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).

10.4 The duties of an independent chair are:

i. To attend the pre-oral meeting with the examiners and assist the examiners in arranging the details for the oral examination (see the relevant University examinations 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 the relevant University examinations policy and the Oral Examination Procedure for Postgraduate Research Degrees for further guidance on conduct of the oral examination).
iii. To ensure that parties other than the candidate and examiners do not contribute to the final outcome of the examination and that they have agreed 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 the relevant University examinations 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 the relevant University examinations policy for further guidance).

viii. To advise examiners, the candidate and other parties involved in the examination on University policy and regulations.

ix. 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.

x. 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.

10.5 Additional regulations 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 PGR Office. They are 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.

Version amendment history		
Version	Date	Reason for change
4.1	Jan 2026	Updated with details of the examination panel for PhD by Enterprise

Document control box	
Policy / Procedure title:	Nomination of Examiners & Independent Chairs for Postgraduate Research Degree Examinations Procedure
Lead contact email	Alex.Hinchliffe@manchester.ac.uk
Date updated:	Jan 2026
Approving body:	MDCSG / AQSCR
Version:	
Supersedes:	4 (Nov 2023)
Previous review dates:	Sep 2009, Nov 2016, June 2022
Next review date:	June 2027
Equality impact outcome:	
Related Statutes, Ordinances, General Regulations:	https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/rbe/rdrd/ordinancesandregulations/
Related policies/procedures/guidance etc.	https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/rbe/rdrd/code/
Policy owner:	Alex Hinchliffe. Research Degrees and Researcher Development Officer
Lead contact:	Alex Hinchliffe