



Graduate Board

Examinations Group

Criteria for the appointment of examiners and independent chairs for research degrees

The full eligibility criteria for the appointment of examiners can be found on the following pages.

The **internal examiner** should normally:

- (i) Be a member of the academic or academic related staff.
- (ii) Hold a permanent appointment of the University of at least 0.3 FTE.
- (iii) In the last 5 years, have either completed the OD&PL course/briefing¹ or acted as internal examiner at Leeds.
- (iv) Not have been involved in the supervision of the candidate.

The **external examiner** should normally:

- (i) Be a senior² member of staff of a university or higher education establishment.
- (ii) Have prior knowledge and experience of UK research degree examinations and standards through previous UK examination experience.

The examiners must normally hold an independent position. The Graduate Board's Examinations Group has expressed the view that the preferred level of experience for a research degree examiner is either experience of supporting a doctoral candidate through to successful completion or previous examination experience, together with an active and independent research profile. Between them, the proposed team should have a balanced level of seniority² and previous research degree examination experience in the UK. This does not mean that a recently appointed lecturer, someone early in their career or individuals from overseas or industry cannot be appointed as examiner, but you should partner them with a more senior and experienced examiner who has experience of the UK research degree examination process. If a team of examiners cannot be found with the expected balance of seniority and experience then the University may require an **independent chair**³ (or a second internal examiner) to be appointed to ensure that the examination is conducted fairly and in accordance with University regulations.

Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs) may be asked by supervisors for their views on individuals who might act as Examiners but the decision about the recommendations for appointment will be made in consultation between the supervisors and the Postgraduate Research Tutor. The final decision about the appointment of Examiners is made by the Examinations Group. On receipt of the completed GRAD examination entry workflow PGR and Operations submits the names of the recommended examiners to the Examinations Group for consideration. The Examinations Group is responsible for the final decision on the appointment of examiners.

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¹ Please see section 6 for further details about the training for internal examiners

² For the purposes of this criteria "Senior" is defined as Senior Lecturer (or equivalent) or above; (normally Grade 9 or above).

³ Please see section 4 for further details about the appointment of an independent chair

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1. General criteria applicable to both the internal and external examiner:

- 1.1 No individual who has been substantially involved in the research may serve as an Examiner. No individual who has a close professional relationship with the PGR under examination may be appointed as an Examiner⁴. It is exceptional to appoint as examiner researchers who have had substantial co-authoring or collaborative involvement in the PGR's work or whose own work is the focus of the research project.
- 1.2 No individual who has a close personal relationship with the PGR under examination, or with the supervisor of the PGR under examination, may be appointed as an Examiner⁵.
- 1.3 Recently retired members of staff may be appointed as examiner provided that they have a continuing link with their University (for example teaching or an honorary title) and are still active in research.
- 1.4 The examiner should hold an independent position. The Examinations Group has expressed the view that the preferred level of experience for a research degree examiner is either experience of supporting a doctoral candidate through to successful completion or previous examination experience, together with an active and independent research profile⁶.
- 1.5 When a team of Examiners have examined a PGR for a research degree and the PGR subsequently undertakes and submits for examination for a second research degree, a different team of Examiners should be appointed. If a School wishes to make a special case for the appointment of the same Examiners, consideration will only be given if an additional external examiner is also appointed to the examining team.
- 1.6 No recommendation for the appointment of an Examiner should be sent forward unless they have informally agreed to act.
- 1.7 The nomination of staff holding a visiting contract is dealt with on a case by case basis.
- 1.8 Any proposals falling outside the areas indicated are referred to the Chair or other member of the Examinations Group for decision.

⁴ For the guidance of Schools the Graduate Board has given examples of what might constitute a close working/professional relationship as co-workers or co-authors on publications.

⁵ For the guidance of Schools the Graduate Board has given examples of what might constitute a close personal relationship as partners, spouses and close family relationships such as brothers, sisters or children.

⁶ An academic case must be made for any members of staff holding positions such as Teaching Fellow. A brief CV must be provided which includes their most recent publications and other research activity to demonstrate an active and independent research profile.

2. Criteria for the appointment of internal examiners

- 2.1 It is presumed that an internal examiner has familiarity with research degrees through completion of a PhD and either experience of supervision (preferably to completion) and/or examination experience of research degrees in the UK.
- 2.2 The Graduate Board requires all members of staff to complete a formal OD&PL training course/briefing on the role of the internal examiner before being recommended for appointment as an internal examiner for the first time at the University of Leeds. For those examiners who are experienced elsewhere but new to Leeds an online briefing may be offered as an alternative.
- 2.3 Where it has been more than 5 years since a member of staff *either* acted as Internal Examiner *or* attended the OD&PL training course on the role of the Internal Examiner it will be necessary for the individual to complete the online OD&PL briefing for experienced examiners before being appointed as Internal Examiner.
- 2.4 Under exceptional circumstances, where a member of staff has not had the opportunity to complete the required training, the Head of School, Postgraduate Tutor or another experienced member of the School may be appointed to act as second (joint) internal examiner⁷ to assist in judgements of the general standard and requirements for the degree. The Board will not approve any future appointment as sole Internal Examiner until the formal University training course has been completed.
- 2.5 In some cases the appointment of an independent chair may be required. Please see section 4.
- 2.6 The internal examiner must normally be a member of the academic or academic related staff holding a permanent appointment of the University of at least 0.3 FTE.
- 2.7 Staff who are on fixed term contracts may be approved for appointment as sole internal examiner on an *ad personam* basis after they have completed at least three years in post at Leeds or have completed a probationary period at Leeds or at another University and provided that they have attended the training course⁸.
- 2.8 Members of staff who are themselves candidates for a research degree of either this or another university may not act as a sole internal examiner.
- 2.9 Honorary members of staff may serve as joint Internal Examiners provided that they have attended the OD&PL training course. However, an honorary member of staff may act as a sole internal examiner for the degrees of MD, DClinPsychol or DClinPaedDent provided:
- (a) they have already acted in that capacity within the University of Leeds; or
 - (b) they have attended the OD&PL training course; and
 - (c) they satisfy the other requirements for acting as an internal examiner which apply to University staff members.

It will not be permitted for both the sole supervisor and sole internal examiner for a candidate to be honorary members of staff.

⁷ Please see 2.12 – 2.13 for an outline of the role of a second internal examiner

⁸ Please bear in mind that, in the event of a recommendation for referral, the normal practice is for the same team of examiners to act for the resubmission.

2.10 The same individual may act as the independent assessor at the “transfer” stage and as the Internal Examiner. However, if an assessor is to act subsequently as an Internal Examiner it is considered that direct involvement in the academic assessment, monitoring and provision of feedback on the PGR’s work subsequent to the transfer review (for example reading and commenting on academic work submitted by the PGR at the end of years 2 and 3) and prior to the final examination is not appropriate.

- An individual, therefore, who has been involved in an Annual Review (Post-Transfer) progression meeting (under Model A) will not be eligible to act as the Internal Examiner for the final examination⁹.
- Involvement in the monitoring and oversight of progress (post-transfer), as part of a Research Degree Committee (or equivalent body) (under Model B), will not normally preclude an individual from acting as the Internal Examiner.

2.11 An individual who has provided an independent academic assessment of a PGR’s work as part of the Unsatisfactory Academic Progress Procedure may not normally then proceed to also act as the Internal Examiner for that candidate in the final thesis examination.

Second (joint) internal examiner

2.12 In cases where a second (joint) Internal Examiner is appointed¹⁰ the second (joint) Internal Examiner is appointed as a full examiner of the thesis and is required to read and examine the thesis under the relevant University procedures. The second (joint) Internal Examiner must, in addition to reading and examining the thesis:

- Complete a Preliminary Report Form;
- Fully participate in the oral examination;
- Ensure that the examination is performed in line with the University’s regulations and procedure;
- Ensure the Examiners’ report is completed in line with the criteria for the particular research degree being examined and sign the Examiners’ Report;
- Give feedback to the first Internal on procedural matters, where appropriate, after the examination.

2.13 It is not necessary for both Internal Examiners to check any corrections to the thesis. The first Internal Examiner can undertake this task alone.

⁹ It is the responsibility of the Faculty/School to ensure that a nominated internal examiner has not acted as an independent assessor as part of an Annual Review (Post-Transfer) under Model A. PGR and Operations will NOT undertake such checks as a matter of routine on receipt of the examination entry form and, therefore, for Faculties adopting Model A the Faculty/School must do this before forwarding the examination entry form to PGR and Operations.

¹⁰ For example where the first internal examiner (who may well be a senior member of staff) is on probation, or has not either acted at Leeds or undertaken the relevant OD&PL course within the last 5 years.

3. Criteria for the appointment of external examiners

3.1 Individuals appointed as external examiners must be independent of the University and of the School concerned and therefore should not undertake any form of employment within the University.

3.2 External examiners should have prior knowledge and experience of UK research degree examinations and standards and should normally be senior¹¹ members of staff of a university or higher education establishment.

3.3 Where individuals who do not meet these criteria are recommended for appointment as external examiner (e.g. appropriate individuals who have not previously examined a research degree in the UK; individuals who do not hold a senior position at a University or HEI), Schools are required to make a special case for their appointment. In such cases: either

(i) the internal examiner must be a senior¹ member of staff with previous examination experience at this University or elsewhere in the UK; and

(ii) the nominated individual will be required to undergo a briefing¹² to ensure s/he is familiarised with the requirements of the UK system and the expectations of the University. This briefing must be provided by a senior, experienced internal examiner who is not involved in the candidature or the examination (usually the PGRT or Head of School) in advance of the oral examination. A record of the briefing must be supplied to Postgraduate Research and Operations;

or

(iii) a second (joint) external examiner who is experienced in UK research degree examinations should be appointed to act as co-external examiner on this occasion;

3.4 To assist the Examinations Group in considering the examination experience across the team, details of the external examiner's previous UK PGR examination experience must be provided via the examination entry workflow in GRAD with a Web link to their CV.

3.5 A period of at least 5 years must have elapsed before a former member of the University's staff may be appointed as an external examiner.

3.6 An external examiner is not normally permitted to act in connection with the examination of a second PGR at this University within a period of 12 months. The University discourages the frequent use of external examiners except in exceptional cases.

3.7 Individuals holding honorary appointments within the University may not act as external examiners. Such individuals may be considered for appointment a joint internal examiner.

3.8 Where a PGR is either sponsored by, receiving supervision from, or undertaking work in an industrial establishment, academic institution or company, the Examinations Group will not

¹¹ For the purposes of this criteria "Senior" is defined as Senior Lecturer (or equivalent) or above (normally grade 9 or above)

¹² See Section 7 of this document

approve an individual employed by that organisation for appointment as an external examiner. The organisation concerned may require a specific confidentiality undertaking (in addition to the general undertaking required by the University from all examiners). Requirements of this kind should be borne in mind when recommending external examiners for appointment.

3.9 Two external examiners must be appointed in those cases where the PGR is a current or former member of staff of the University, employed at Grade 7 or above (for exceptions and the policy in the School of Medicine see below). At least one Internal Examiner is required in all cases.

- a. PGRs appointed to a University Grade 7 position after completion of the standard period of study for the degree on which they are registered will normally require only one external examiner.
- b. If a medically qualified (employed on the clinical pay scales) or Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) and Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) registered PGR is a current or former member of staff of the University and is (or was) of the status of Research Fellow or Tutor, only one external examiner will normally be appointed. Where a medically qualified PGR is a current or former member of staff of the University and is (or was) of the status of lecturer or above, two external examiners must be appointed.

3.10 In the case of a submission of a thesis in a language other than English information about the experience of proposed Examiners will be required at the time of appointment. Examiners will only be eligible for appointment where they have a clear understanding of the nature and quality of UK research degrees. The Examiners must be proficient both in the language of submission and in English.

3.11 It is not possible for the same individual to act as an External Assessor at transfer stage and as the external examiner for the final examination of the PGR.

4. Use of an Independent Chair for research degree examinations

4.1 An Independent Chair might be appointed to ensure the best PGR experience if the team of examiners with the most appropriate subject knowledge have, for example, minimal UK examining experience or seniority. Examples of when an Independent Chair will normally be appointed include:

- Where the internal will be undertaking their first research degree examination.
- Where neither the external or internal examiner holds a senior academic position.
- Where there are a limited number of previous UK PGR examinations across the team.
- Where a second viva is required on a resubmission following referral.
- Where approval is given for the viva to be conducted via video streaming.
- Where exceptional or non-standard examination arrangements are agreed.

4.2 Where it can be demonstrated that an internal examiner has significant experience of examining elsewhere in the UK, but will be undertaking their first appointment as an internal examiner at Leeds, a briefing can be provided by the School before the viva as an alternative to the appointment of an independent chair. See section 7 for further advice.

4.3 After the examination entry arrangements have been reviewed by the Examinations Group, PGR&O will advise the Director of PGR Studies in individual cases if an Independent Chair should be appointed. The nomination for the Independent Chair should be made to PGR&O by the Director of PGR Studies (in consultation with the Supervisor(s)) for approval by the Examinations Group.

4.4 The role of the Independent Chair is to ensure that the examination is conducted fairly and professionally, and in accordance with University regulations.

4.5 The Independent Chair is expected to:

- Be a senior¹³ member of staff of Leeds from a cognate discipline but not necessarily from the same School, with significant and recent experience of research degree examinations at Leeds. The Chair is normally expected to have acted as internal examiner at Leeds a minimum of 3 times, including at least once in the last 3 years.
- Advise the examiners on process and procedures before, during and after the examination.
- Ensure that the examination is conducted fairly and professionally, and in accordance with University regulations.
- Attend the meeting with the examiners prior to the viva, where preliminary reports are discussed.
- Be present for the duration of the oral examination and the post-viva discussions.
- Ensure that the examiners complete and return to PGR&O all the necessary paperwork.
- Complete a brief report after the oral examination to confirm s/he is satisfied that the examination was conducted in accordance with the University's regulations. A pro forma for this purpose will be provided and should be submitted with the final report of the examiners.

¹³ For the purposes of this criteria "Senior" is defined as Senior Lecturer (or equivalent) or above; (normally Grade 9 or above).

4.6 The Independent Chair is not expected to

- Read the thesis or be an expert in the subject.
- Complete a preliminary report.
- Play a role in academic examination of the PGR or question the PGR on the work being examined at the oral examination.
- Undertake the arrangements for organisation of the oral examination. This remains the responsibility of the Internal Examiner.

5. Arrangements for candidates registered at one of the Accredited Institutions

In the case of PGRs registered for a research degree at one of the University's accredited Institutions the following arrangements will apply:

5.2 The Internal Examiner should normally be

(a) a member of the University staff who meets the University's eligibility requirements to act as an Internal Examiner as set out above;

OR

(b) a member of staff at an accredited Institution who satisfies all the following conditions:

- (i) they have already acted in that capacity within the University of Leeds, while having co-examined with a tenured member of the University Staff;
- (ii) they have previously supervised a student to successful completion for the research degree under examination;
- (iii) they satisfy the other requirements for acting as an internal examiner which apply to University staff members, including attending a recognised training course for this purpose as provided by OD&PL.

Either (i) or (iii) above must have been undertaken in the past 5 years.

5.3 Supervisors must not be appointed as Examiners

5.4 A separate document¹⁴ is provided which outlines the eligibility criteria for appointment of internal examiners for research degree candidates registered at York St John University and includes the special arrangements agreed by the Examinations Group. This serves as a separate, "stand-alone" document to the main eligibility criteria for Internal Examiners (above) for use by YSJU staff only.

¹⁴http://www.leeds.ac.uk/rsa/assets/pdfs/thesis_submissionandexamination/YSJU_Stand%20alone_Examiners_Final.pdf

6. Training for Internal Examiners

The internal examiner assures fairness and consistency of the examination by ensuring the University's procedures, processes and criteria for the examination of postgraduate research degree candidates are followed.

For this reason the Graduate Board requires all Internal Examiners to complete an OD&PL training course/briefing on the role before acting as Internal Examiner at Leeds.

The training provided to internal examiners forms part of the University's quality assurance processes¹⁵ as an alternative to the practice of routinely appointing an independent chair for every examination. The training helps to ensure the quality and standard of Leeds research degrees is upheld. This includes making sure that the viva process is fair for all students, consistent across the university and challenging.

The course/briefing covers the role and responsibilities of the internal examiner in line with University policy and procedures. Graduate Board requires all internal examiners to undergo such training, including both those new to the role and those who are experienced examiners at other Institutions but are new to Leeds or have not acted at Leeds in the last 5 years:

- **For those new to the role:** The Role of the Internal Examiner (*half day course* delivered by academic members of staff who are current or former members of the Examinations Group). This must be completed before the viva.
- **For experienced examiners** (but are new to Leeds or have not acted at Leeds in the last 5 years): Update for experienced internal examiners (*on-line briefing*). This must be completed before the thesis can be sent for examination.

For further information please see the [OD&PL website](#).¹⁶

PGR & Operations has records of when members of University staff have acted as internal examiner and/or completed the OD&PL Course/Briefing, will check this on receipt of the examination entry form and will advise if an Internal Examiner is required to complete the training before the viva. These details can also be checked with PGR&O at any point by contacting: rp_examinations@adm.leeds.ac.uk

¹⁵ In line with QAA's UK Quality Code Chapter B: Research Degrees

¹⁶<http://www.sddu.leeds.ac.uk/research-innovation/research-development-for-academic-staff/postgraduate-research-student-supervision/> The half day course for those new to the role can be booked directly with OD&PL.

7. Briefings for experienced UK Examiners

7.1 Where an internal examiner has significant experience of examining elsewhere in the UK but will be undertaking their first appointment as an internal examiner at Leeds:

- The internal examiner must complete the ODPL *Online Briefing for Experienced Examiners* before the thesis is sent for examination; and
- A briefing must be provided by the School before the viva.

7.2 This forms part of the University's quality assurance processes as an alternative to the appointment of an independent chair.

7.3 The guidance that follows may be helpful when providing the briefing. It is not intended as a prescriptive list but suggests areas and topics which might be covered. Reference should be made to the [Instructions to Examiners](#) which provide further detail on the role. The intention is to familiarise the Internal Examiner with the Leeds process and their particular responsibilities under the Leeds system. It should be a dialogue with the opportunity for questions. It must be provided by the PGRT or another senior member of staff who is an experienced internal examiner but independent of the candidature and the examination. It is not expected that more than 20 minutes will be required.

Overview

- [Instructions to Examiners](#) will be provided which cover the responsibilities and duties of Examiners prior to, during and following the viva plus guidance on completing requisite forms.
- Criteria for award and [Learning Outcomes](#) provided for each programme

Before the viva

- Make viva arrangements with external & PGR (date, time, location). The responsibilities of the internal to organise the viva is more fully described in the [Instructions to Examiners](#).
- Viva ideally within 6 weeks but must be within 3 months of receiving thesis.
- Complete a **brief** preliminary report. Do NOT make a recommendation at this stage.

Role of Supervisor

- PGR may invite one supervisor as an observer
- If attending, they must remain silent and must leave room during decision making process.
- If not attending, they must be available in person/contactable for consultation if necessary.

The viva

- Good practice guidance on the conduct of the viva is provided in the [Instructions to Examiners](#)
- No Leeds-specific regulations regarding the length of the viva (varies between disciplines).
- Both the internal and external take an equal and active role in the viva.
- Examiners **must not reveal a recommendation to the PGR in advance of the viva.**

After the viva

- Examiners must reach a joint recommendation after the viva about whether the award of the degree can be recommended, based on their assessment of the written thesis combined with the PGR's performance in the viva.
- The recommendations available are more fully described in the [Instructions to Examiners](#).
- PGR normally informed immediately after the viva but by no later than 24 hours after the viva.
- Examiners' recommendation is subject to approval by Examinations Group.
- Ensure the joint report is completed and signed (**original signatures needed**) - before external leaves.
- Examiners must report with specific examples on evidence of originality, independent critical ability, matter suitable for publication, written style and presentation of thesis and performance at the viva¹⁷.
- For minor deficiencies: a **summary of the nature of the deficiencies** must be included in the report. Full list given in writing to the PGR within 24 hours of the viva (Internal must **ensure this happens**).
- For referral: notes for guidance must be sent in with report. Do not give these to the PGR.
- A recommendation for research excellence can be made via report for an outstanding doctoral thesis.
- Return the joint reports plus all preliminary reports to your School/Faculty PGR admin contact who will arrange PGRT signature and return to PGR&O for consideration by the Examinations Group.
- For an award with editorial and presentation corrections or minor deficiencies the internal is responsible for checking and approving the corrections after the viva and informing PGR and PGRO.
- External should be advised that fee claim form should be returned to PGR&O. Expenses claim should be returned to the School (advice sent with thesis)

Useful links and contacts:

- Examiners' [Preliminary Report Form](#) Templates
- Examiners' [Joint Report Form](#) Templates
- [Instructions to Examiners](#)
- Thesis examination section of PGR & Operations: rp_examinations@adm.leeds.ac.uk Ext 34003

¹⁷ A different emphasis will be needed where the thesis is a Masters by Research/MPhil submission

8. Briefings for External Examiners¹⁸

- 8.1 Where the external examiner will be undertaking their first appointment as an external examiner in the UK a briefing must be provided by the School before the viva.
- 8.2 The guidance below is designed to guide you when providing a briefing to an external examiner who will be undertaking their first UK PGR examination. It is not intended as a prescriptive list but suggests areas and topics which might be covered. This is intended to familiarise the Examiner with the requirements of the UK system and the expectations of Leeds and should be a dialogue with the opportunity for questions. It must be provided by a senior, experienced internal examiner who is independent of the candidature and the examination. A face to face meeting before the viva the preferred format (although phone is acceptable where this is not practicable).

Programme structure

- External Examiner is key feature of UK quality assurance processes.
- Learning Outcomes for each programme:
http://students.leeds.ac.uk/info/21519/rules_regulations_and_guidelines/958/ordinances
- Examiners are asked to bear in mind that a PhD¹⁹ thesis represents research that may reasonably be expected of a capable and diligent student within the standard period of study.
- Doctorate¹ award at Leeds: examiners must identify and report on evidence of originality, independent critical ability and matter suitable for publication (peer-reviewed publishable quality in the discipline).

Before the viva

- Complete a separate, preliminary report after evaluating the candidate's thesis. **Do not** make a recommendation at this stage. Reports exchanged before viva to help plan format & questions

The viva

- Purpose of the viva: to ensure that the work reaches the University standards for the degree; that the work has been written and is understood by the candidate and to place the research in the context of the wider field.
- **Closed viva:** only the PGR, the examiners, the independent chair (if appointed) and the supervisor (if agreed) in attendance.
- Both the internal and external examiners take an equal and active role in the viva.
- Examiners **must not reveal a recommendation to the PGR in advance of the viva.**
- Examiners must reach a joint recommendation after the viva about whether the award of the degree can be recommended, based on their assessment of the written thesis combined with the PGR's performance in the viva.

¹⁸ Guidance reviewed and agreed by the Examinations Group April 2018

¹⁹ A different emphasis will be needed where the thesis is practice-led research, professional doctorate or a Masters by Research/MPhil submission and also if part-time/split-site

- Criteria for award of the degree: e.g. doctorate degree - evidence of originality, independent critical ability and matter suitable for publication (peer-reviewed quality in the discipline).¹
- Viva is an opportunity to raise questions in areas where examiners are not satisfied with the thesis and encourage the PGR to provide convincing evidence that the criteria for award can be met.

After the viva

- The PGR must be advised of the examiners' recommendation within 24 hours.
- A joint examiners' report is required following the viva which must indicate the examiners' recommendation and how the candidate has met (or not) the criteria for the award of the degree. This must provide specific examples from the thesis and viva.
- Possible recommendations examiners can make (including corrections, referral & MPhil award on PhD). If referral: notes for guidance must be prepared. These will be sent to the candidate.

Useful links:

- [QAA: Doctoral Degree Characteristics](#) sets out the generic characteristics of a UK doctoral degree and includes comparisons with Europe and elsewhere
- University of Leeds [Instructions to Examiners](#) cover the responsibilities and duties of Examiners prior to, during and following the viva plus guidance on completing requisite forms
- University of Leeds Examiners' [Preliminary Report Form](#) Templates
- University of Leeds Examiners' [Joint Report Form](#) Templates