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/briefing\(^1\) 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 senior\(^2\) 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 seniority\(^2\) 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 Director of PGR Studies. The final decision about the appointment of Examiners is made by the Examinations Group. On receipt of the completed GRAD examination entry workflow Doctoral College 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 Examiner. 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 Examiner.  

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 profile.

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.

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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 examiner\(^7\) 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 course\(^8\).

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 DPaedDent 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.

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\(^7\) 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 examination.\(^9\)

- 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 appointed\(^10\) 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.

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\(^9\) 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 senior\(^{11}\) 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 senior\(^{1}\) 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 briefing\(^{12}\) 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 DOPGRS or Head of School) in advance of the oral examination. A record of the briefing must be supplied to Doctoral College 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

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\(^{1}\) 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 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, DCO 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 DCO 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. The 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 DCO 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.

4.5 The Independent Chair is not expected to

- Read the thesis or be an expert in the subject.

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13 For the purposes of this criteria “Senior” is defined as Senior Lecturer (or equivalent) or above; (normally Grade 9 or above).
• 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 Examiners.
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 Where an accredited institution wishes to nominate a member of staff at the Institution who does not meet regulation b (i) above, the Graduate Board’s Examinations Group will give special consideration to their appointment as internal examiner but with a member of the University of Leeds staff acting as an independent chair for the examination (or an experienced member of the Institution on a case by case basis).

A special case for appointment under these arrangements must be made, by the individual appointed by the accredited institution with responsibility for academic administration, and will be considered on an individual case by case basis.

It is expected that the nominated individual will:

- normally be a senior member of staff;
- have substantial previous examination experience at other UK Institutions;
- provide details of previous research degree examination experience (numbers and degrees examined) along with a CV;
- have successfully completed a University of Leeds recognised training course for research degree internal examiners, as provided by University of Leeds OD&PL in the past 60 months;
• have previously supervised a student to successful completion for the research
degree under examination;
• satisfy the other requirements for acting as internal examiner which apply to
University staff members

It would be expected that the External Examiner would be a senior member of staff with
previous research degree examination experience in the UK
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 processes 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]({#14}).

Doctoral College 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 DCO at any point by contacting: rp_examinations@adm.leeds.ac.uk.

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14[http://www.sddu.leeds.ac.uk/research-innovation/research-development-for-academic-staff/postgraduate-research-student-supervision/](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 Guidance is available from DCO which 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 DoPGRS 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.

7.4 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.

7.5 Guidance is available from DCO to assist with 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. Reference should be made to the Instructions to Examiners which provide further detail on the role. 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).

. Updated Feb 2021

(Updated to include updates to Accredited Institution guidance)