Guidance for the Appointment of Examiners for Research Degrees

This guidance is for the process of appointing internal and external examiners for research degrees. This guidance should be read in conjunction with General Regulation 36 and 37 for Research Degrees and Appendix 1: Roles within the Examination Procedure.

1. Examiners nomination process

In most cases examination for a research student thesis normally required one internal and one external examiner should be appointed, except in the below cases:

In cases where:

i) **The candidate is a lecturer at the University of Aberdeen:**

- Two external examiners shall be appointed, with an internal moderator appointed to oversee arrangements and chair the oral exam.
- Where a moderator is appointed the moderator is responsible for overseeing the examination and, in particular, to ensure that standard University procedures and policies are followed.

ii) **The candidate is a Teaching Fellow, Research Fellow or Research Assistant at the University of Aberdeen:**

- The examination team should normally comprise of one external and one internal examiner.
- The internal examiner should not be the candidate’s line manager.
- Two external examiners do not need to be appointed, unless on the recommendation of the Head of School, it is felt appropriate to do so.
- Recommendation from a Head of School for two external examiners would most likely occur when only internals available with knowledge of the research area are closely associated with the candidate's work, e.g. they are member of staff named on any research contract on which the candidate is employed.
iii) **The candidate is joint with Curtin University:**

- The Institutions, acting together, shall be responsible for the selection, approval, and appointment of the examiners.
- Two external examiners shall be appointed (one for Curtin and one for Aberdeen who shall be from the discipline in which the doctorate has been undertaken) along with one Moderator internal to the Home institution who shall not be one of the Supervisors and whose sole role is to uphold the correct conduct of the examination.

2. **General Requirements in the Appointment of Examiners**

Examiners will normally be expert in one or more aspects of the student’s thesis. It is not expected that either will necessarily be expert in the whole field covered by the thesis, and their expertise will normally be complementary.

Examiners must be impartial in their thinking and have no connection that may suggest their decision could be influenced, no conflicts of interest and no personal gain from the outcome of the examination or publication of the student’s thesis research.

Guidance on impartiality and what could constitute a conflict of interest is provided below.

3. **Appointment of Internal Examiner**

**The Internal Examiner must:**

- Be a Professor, Reader or Lecturer, or academic staff of an equivalent employment grade in the University who is **not and has not been** a supervisor of the candidate.
- Be a contracted employee of the University (this excludes emeritus and honorary members of staff) or:
  - A member of an associated research institute who holds a University of Aberdeen appointment, **or**:
  - A former member of staff who has left the University since the candidate completed their research (and will be offered the same fee as an external examiner).
Academic staff who have been involved as an assessor in Annual Progression Exercises may act as Internal Examiner if deemed appropriate by all parties.

4. **Appointment of External Examiner:**

   *The External Examiner must:*

   - Be a Professor, Reader or Lecturer, or academic staff of an equivalent employment grade. Where the proposed external does not hold an academic position a case should be made as to why the proposed examiner is the best person to examine the candidate.
   - Emeritus and honorary members of staff can act as an external examiner as long as they were not involved in supervision of the student or the research project or meet any of the conflicts of interest described in section 6.

   - Be independent from the University i.e.
     - Is not employed by the University of Aberdeen.
     - Not have worked in the same department as the candidate at any point, nor have been employed by the UoA whilst the candidate has been a student.
     - Not be due to start employment at the UoA.
     - See nomination form – an expert in field and with background but may not currently be employed in an academic role

5. **Impartiality**

Internal and external examiners must be impartial in their thinking and have no connection that may suggest their decision could be influenced. I.e., **must not** have a personal relationship with anyone involved in the examination process such as the student, supervisor, internal examiner, or anyone involved in the examination decision-making process.

It is recognised that some professional relationships will exist without impacting impartiality such as grading REF submissions, writing references.

6. **Conflicts of interest**

The following are conflicts of interest and should be avoided where possible and clearly justified when appointing an external examiner:

   - Collaboration or co-authorship with the student
• Collaboration or co-authorship with the supervisor or internal examiner on topics closely related to the student’s research
• The supervisor or internal examiner has recently examined, or will or imminently examine, one of the external’s research students
• There exists a formal relationship with the department which might have meant working with student (e.g. honorary visiting professor in same research group).

The following might present conflict of interest and should be avoided where possible when appointing an internal or external examiner:

• An academic relationship exists, such as co-authorship or collaboration or sitting on the same funding committee, to the supervisor or internal examiner, but which does not involve the student project
• An academic relationship exists to the Department, but which does not involve the student as a researcher in any way
• The external was the supervisor’s supervisor or the supervisor’s supervisee
• The external recently supervised the student’s dissertation or thesis at another institution as part of a previous taught programme.

The following examples would not constitute conflicts of interest:

• The external has met the student at conferences
• The external knows the supervisor well but no collaboration or co-authorship
• The external knows the internal examiner well but no collaboration or co-authorship
• Membership of same professional association or body as the supervisor or internal examiner
• The external was the supervisor’s PhD examiner.

7. Inclusive Adjustments
• If the examiner(s) or the research student has a disability, inclusive adjustments can be made for the viva. Required adjustments from any party should be made clear at the initial stages of the nomination process as it may be necessary to align the student’s needs with those of the examiner(s).
• The research student should arrange a meeting with Student Advice & Support and/or the Supervisory Team to discuss adjustments ahead of examination, if these have not already been agreed.
• Inclusive adjustments for an examination will be agreed on a case by case basis but examples can be found in provisions guidance document. Some provisions
may require additional approval from Registry or the Dean for PGR, this is indicated in the provisions guidance document.

- With the PGR’s consent, the examiners can be made aware of the nature of the PGR's disability and associated adjustments, for question formation/structure within the viva. The same academic standards/core competencies for the progression through, and the award of the research degree, must be upheld.
- It shall be the responsibility of the supervisor to make sure that the internal examiner is aware of any provisions required e.g. room accessibility requirements and any adjustments that need to be made to the examination procedure. The supervisor and/or internal examiner should contact their School’s inclusion coordinator for support.

Appendix 1: Roles within the Examination Procedure

Head of School
- Nominates examiners after consultation with the candidate’s supervisor.

Supervisor(s)
- Discuss potential examiners with Head of School
- Reviews Turnitin similarity report and highlights any concerns.
- Discuss inclusive adjustments with student and upon consent from the student, shares with internal examiner to put in place with support from School inclusion coordinator.

Internal Examiner
- Arranges oral examination with external examiner and candidate (ideally within 2 months of thesis being submitted), and makes sure supervisor is available on the day. Informs student of relevant information such as date/time.
- Informs the candidate of any delays in oral examination.
- Ensures University procedures are followed
- Ensures any required inclusive adjustments for student and/or examiners are put in place with the support of the School Disability Coordinator and student support.
- Makes sure Independent Reports are completed and exchange before the oral examination
- Makes sure that the candidate is informed on the day of the recommendation to be made by the examiners.
- Makes sure Joint Report is completed on day of oral examination and submitted to the Registry within three working days of the oral examination, along with both Independent Reports and corrections required, if required. The internal must ensure that the paperwork is completed and signed by both examiners.
- Signs off minor corrections as complete.
• Responsible for liaising with the external if any issues arise with reports, i.e. missing signatures etc.
• Ensures any inclusive adjustments are in place, with support from the School Inclusion Coordinator.

Internal Moderator (if required)
• The Internal Moderator is required for Quality Assurance purposes and is there to ensure that the University’s procedures are followed. The internal moderator will perform all the tasks stated above for the internal examiner, except examining the thesis.
• The internal moderator is not permitted to sign off a candidate’s minor corrections. This must be one of the externals. The internal moderator must ensure that one external is designated to check the minor corrections and sign off the appropriate paperwork.

Registry
• Send nomination form to School for completion upon receipt of Intention to Submit.
• Send thesis to examiners upon receipt (the thesis will be sent as soon as possible from when it is submitted, providing the nomination of examiners has been approved).
• Issues letter detailing the outcome of the oral examination to the candidate from oral examination once reports are approved. A further letter will be issued once a minor corrections form is received from the internal examiner certifying that the corrections have been made.
• Will liaise with the internal examiner/moderator if reports/corrections forms remain outstanding for longer than the time frame for submission stipulated above.
• Receives reports from internal examiner/moderator post-oral examination and seeks QAC approval for the recommendation.
• Liaises with internal examiner/moderator if there are any issues arising from the reports. For example, if reports have been submitted without signatures, the Registry will contact the internal and ask that signed reports be supplied. It would be for the Internal to then liaise with the external.