

Guidance on the Nomination of the Examination Panel

1. Introduction

1.1. This document sets out guidance for Faculties/Research Institutes (RIs) on the procedures for nominating examiners and an Independent Chair for a research degree examination panel.

1.2. The guidance in the document supplements and expands on the information contained in the [Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Degrees](#) (Section 12.21-12.24).

1.3. Where references to the approval criteria applied by the Research Degrees Committee (RDC) occur, users of this document can also understand them as applying to the relevant Faculty/RI PGR Committee. RDC is ultimately responsible for approving examination panels on behalf of Senate, and therefore sets the institutional requirements in this area.

2. Nomination of Panel Members

2.1. Approval Process

2.1.1. The Lead Supervisor of a research degree student is responsible for nominating the members of an examination panel.

2.1.2. In making a decision about the nomination, the Lead Supervisor should consult both their student and, where appropriate, the members of the student's supervisory team.

2.1.3. To make the nomination, the Lead Supervisor must complete the [Examination Panel & Thesis Title Approval Form](#) and submit it to the PGR Administrator of their Faculty/RI. The PGR Administrator will ensure that the relevant Faculty/RI PGR Committee considers and approves the form, with formal sign off required from the PG/PGR Director in Section H of the form, before referring it to the RDC for final approval.

2.1.4. If the RDC declines the nomination, the Secretary of the RDC will confirm this outcome to the PGR Administrator and Lead Supervisor along with the rationale for the decision. The Lead Supervisor must then make changes to the [Examination Panel & Thesis Title Approval Form](#) to nominate an alternative examiner(s) and/or Chair. The amended form will follow the same approval route as outlined in [2.1.3](#).

2.1.5. The organiser listed for each examination panel can be determined by the Lead Supervisor. In most circumstances, the role sits with the PGR Administrator, Chair, or Internal Examiner. Whoever is allocated the role in a given examination panel must inform the PGR Administration Team (exams.pgr@keele.ac.uk) once a date for the examination is set.

2.2. Nomination of Examiners

2.2.1. The Lead Supervisor should in general nominate one External Examiner and one Internal Examiner for the panel. The Internal Examiner must not be the Lead Supervisor themselves or either a current or previous member of the student's broader supervisory team.

2.2.2. In some cases, it is appropriate for a Lead Supervisor to nominate two External Examiners instead of one Internal Examiner and one External Examiner. The circumstances in which this might happen are as follows:

- The student is a current or previous member of academic staff of the University (this does not include students employed as Graduate Teaching Assistants and Demonstrators, or those studying on Fellowships).
- There is no internal candidate with (i) relevant subject-specific or methodological expertise to examine the thesis, and/or (ii) suitable prior experience of supervising to completion and examining at the level of the degree (see [2.2.4](#) below for the full criteria which nominees must meet).
- There is no suitable internal candidate due to other reasons, e.g. personal difficulties between the student and that member of academic staff, or a personal/romantic relationship between the student and that member of academic staff.

2.2.3. The RDC can, in exceptional circumstances, consider the nomination of two External Examiners alongside an Internal Examiner. This is a rare scenario, and would be contingent on the Lead Supervisor making a strong case in Section E of the [Examination Panel & Thesis Title Approval Form](#) and that case receiving the support of the PG/PGR Director (on behalf of the Faculty/RI PGR Committee) in Section H of the form. The nomination of three examiners could pertain in cases where an internal or external candidate is a world-leading researcher in a specialist field but has no prior experience of supervising to completion or examining. The third panel member should have such experience in one or both areas in order to provide the requisite balance. All three examiners in this scenario must write a Pre-Viva Examiner's Report and contribute to the Post-Viva Examiners' Joint Report.

2.2.4. The Research Degrees Committee applies the following criteria when considering the nomination of examiners for examination panels:

Expertise

- Examiners should be subject-specific and/or methodological experts in the research field of the student (with the overall panel covering specialism in both the subject and the relevant methodology/ies).
- Examiners should in general hold a post of Senior Lecturer/Principal Lecturer or above (but see [2.2.5](#) below).*
- Internal colleagues on Honorary Contracts are eligible for proposal as Internal Examiners.
- The combined experience of the examiners must include both supervising to completion and examining at the level of the degree, either at Keele or at another Higher Education Institution. Each examiner must have experience in at least one of these areas: the Research Degrees Committee will decline the nomination of an examiner with no experience in either area (apart from an exceptional case of the type set out in [2.2.3](#)).

Collaboration

- Examiners must not be collaborators in the student's research. If there are previous links of this kind between the student and one or both of the examiners nominated, the student's Lead Supervisor must declare them in the relevant box in the examiner section of the [Examination Panel & Thesis Title Approval Form](#) so that the Research Degrees Committee can take them into consideration. The Research Degrees Committee will likely decline the nomination of an examiner if the collaboration might result in a joint publication between the student and examiner proposed.
- If examiners are not collaborators in the student's research but have existing connections with the student, the Lead Supervisor should declare them in the relevant box in the examiner

section of the [Examination Panel & Thesis Title Approval Form](#). Connections could include (i) the Internal Examiner nominated being a member of the panel which assessed the student at Annual Progress Review 1 (Doctoral Procession), (ii) the Internal Examiner nominated working in the same laboratory or office as the student, or (iii) the examiners having existing knowledge about the student's research (e.g. through conference attendance or email correspondence). The Research Degrees Committee will take a reasoned approach to these declarations; if, however, the Committee has any doubts about the level of contact between the student and examiner(s), or the extent of the examiner('s)' knowledge of the student's research, it will likely decline the nomination.

- In normal circumstances, examiners should not be active or current collaborators with the Lead Supervisor. The RDC is, however, aware of disciplinary differences in this regard, with collaboration between colleagues common practice in some academic areas. The Lead Supervisor must declare any previous collaboration in Section E of the [Examination Panel & Thesis Title Approval Form](#) so that the Research Degrees Committee so that the RDC is appraised of the situation and is better able to make a decision on the nomination.

Additional Declarations

- In normal circumstances, examiners and their research should not form the focus of the student's thesis. Where this is the case, the Lead Supervisor should declare this fact in Section E of the [Examination Panel & Thesis Title Approval Form](#) so that the RDC is appraised of the situation and is better able to make a decision on the nomination.
- In normal circumstances, examiners should not be, or have been, in a personal or romantic relationship with the Lead Supervisor, and must not be, or have been, in a relationship of any kind with the student. If there is a relationship between an examiner and the Lead Supervisor, the Lead Supervisor should declare the relationship in Section E of the [Examination Panel & Thesis Title Approval Form](#) so that the RDC is appraised of the facts and is better able to make a decision on the nomination.

2.2.5. *If an examiner nominated holds a post below Senior Lecturer (e.g. Lecturer or a position such as Research or Teaching Fellow), the Lead Supervisor proposing the nomination must provide information in Section E of the [Examination Panel & Thesis Title Approval Form](#) which substantiates and justifies the proposal of this member of staff. This will help the Research Degrees Committee to make an informed decision on the nomination. The nominee must fulfil the requirement in the third bullet point of **2.2.4** of having experience in at least one of the two areas of supervising to completion and examining at the level of the degree.

2.2.6. If an examiner nominated has supervised to completion but not examined at the level of the degree (or *vice versa*) the Lead Supervisor proposing the nomination should give careful thought to the overall balance of the panel. In this scenario, the Research Degrees Committee would recommend pairing a comparatively inexperienced examiner with another examiner and Independent Chair who both have substantial experience of supervising and examining at the level of the degree. It is also considered good practice for the Lead Supervisor to add a statement to Section E of the [Examination Panel & Thesis Title Approval Form](#) indicating the attempt to nominate a balanced panel in cases where one of the examiners is comparatively inexperienced. If both examiners nominated are inexperienced, the Research Degrees Committee will likely ask the Lead Supervisor to review the panel proposed and nominate a more experienced Internal or External Examiner in the interests of achieving a more suitable balance.

2.3. Nomination of Independent Chair

2.3.1. Each examination must have an Independent Chair, who manages the conduct of the oral

examination and who takes no part in the examination itself. For detailed guidance on the role of the Chair, please see the [Guidance on the Oral Examination](#).

2.3.2. The Independent Chair must be a member of Keele academic staff. In order to be eligible for the role of Chair, members of staff must complete the [Independent Chair Approval Form](#). The relevant Faculty/RI PGR Committee will consider and approve the form. Following approval, the PGR Administrator will then share with the Centre Manager in the Academic Development Team in KIITE. [Academic Development](#) offers an online training course for Chairs, which members of staff should also complete prior to chairing their first examination.

2.3.3. The PGR Administrator in each Faculty/RI should maintain their own list of members of academic staff who are approved to serve as Independent Chairs. This will help the Lead Supervisor when nominating a member of staff to be Chair of an examination panel.

2.3.4. The Research Degrees Committee applies the following criteria when considering the nomination of Independent Chairs for examination panels:

Experience and Research Area

- The Independent Chair should have experience of examining at the level of the degree, either at Keele or at another Higher Education Institution.
- Independent Chairs should in general come from the same Faculty/Research Institute as the student. This is because the Chair, while not needing to be a subject-specific expert, should be sufficiently knowledgeable about the student's general research area or discipline to be able to oversee the examination. The Research Degrees Committee will consider nominations for Chairs from another Faculty/RI where there is a clear rationale for proposing the member of staff (e.g. interdisciplinary research topic).

Eligibility

- PG/PGR Directors should not serve as Independent Chairs. If the student appeals the outcome of the examination, the PG/PGR Director will need to act as an investigator and respondent to the appeal, and therefore needs to be appropriately independent of the examination itself.
- Independent Chairs should either have completed the online training which KIITE offers (see [2.3.2](#) above) or commit to doing so before their first examination.

Declaration

- Under normal circumstances, Independent Chairs should not be, or have been, in a personal or romantic relationship with the Lead Supervisor, and must not be, or have been, in a relationship of any kind with the student. While there is recognition that the Independent Chair does not make a recommendation of an award outcome, this person could be asked to intervene with, or advise, the examiners in the lead-up to the examination, during the examination, or following the examination. If there is a relationship between an examiner and the Independent Chair, the Lead Supervisor should declare the relationship in Section E of the [Examination Panel & Thesis Title Approval Form](#) so that the RDC is apprised of the facts and is better able to make a decision on the nomination.