

Appendix 8: Guidelines for Nomination of Examiners

At least 3 months before the submission of the thesis is expected, the Director of Studies will propose on the 'Nomination of Research Degree Examiners' (NOMEX) form the arrangements for the student's examination.

The Director of Studies has responsibility for obtaining the required information from the proposed examiners and transferring the relevant details to the NOMEX Form and accompanying CV template.

Criteria for the Appointment of Research Degree Examiners

To ensure the good standing of University of Wolverhampton Research Degrees, the examiners appointed for each student must be able, and be seen to be able, to make an independent assessment of the student and their thesis.

The supervisors may wish to consult the student for their views on individuals who might act as examiners, but the student's supervisors are responsible for nominating suitable examiners and should do so well in advance of the student submitting their thesis, to avoid subsequent delays in the examination process. Nominations should not be made unless the proposed examiners have informally agreed to act.

In support of the University's commitment to equality and diversity, supervisory teams are asked to consider, where possible, the gender and ethnicity balance of the examiners when making nominations.

All examiners must be formally appointed by the Research Awards Sub-Committee (RASC) following review by Research Student Boards (RSBs) within the Faculties/Research Institutes. The RSB advises on the academic expertise and suitability of the nominees; whilst RASC checks for any potential conflicts of interest the student or supervisor may have with the nominees.

Once examiners have been approved, Registry will write to the examiners confirming their appointment. Under no circumstances should an examination proceed until the examiners have been formally appointed by the University.

Once approved the examiners are appointed for a period of 12 calendar months. If the viva has not taken place by the end of this period, the Research Awards Sub-Committee will require, from the Director of Studies, either:

- a) written confirmation that the examination team remains valid, or,
- b) submission of a revised 'Nomination of Research Degree Examiners' (NOMEX) form.

Where an examination cannot be held within four months of thesis submission or resubmission because of the unavailability of an approved examiner, the Research Awards sub-committee may rescind the appointment of all or any of the examiners and appoint new examiners as appropriate.

Examiners should respect the confidentiality of the examination process. Under no circumstances should examiners discuss their views regarding the quality of the thesis or the content of their independent Preliminary Report and recommendations therein with the student, the other examiner(s), the supervisory team, or the course leader (in the case of Professional Doctorates). These discussions are only appropriate to be had between examiners at the pre-viva meeting where Preliminary reports are exchanged.

Examiners should respect the confidentiality of the material they are examining. In some circumstances, where students are sponsored by a company or industrial body, the examiners may need to sign a specific confidentiality agreement, as required by the sponsor.

Where a student is required to resubmit their thesis, the same examiners will normally undertake the re-examination, other than in exceptional circumstances (e.g. if an examiner has since retired and no longer wishes to participate).

Criteria for the Appointment of Both the Internal and External Examiner

Examiners should normally hold a degree in a cognate or relevant discipline that is at least equivalent to the degree that they are examining.

It is accepted that examiners may be professionally acquainted with the supervisors, and sometimes the student, and this in itself is not a bar to acting as an examiner. However, there must not be a personal link between the examiners and the student.

The examiners appointed should not have had any significant research or other contact with the student or supervisors which might inhibit a completely objective examination.

Supervisory teams should disclose details of any situations which have the potential to impair the ability of the examiner(s) to make a fair and impartial assessment of the student's thesis. A non-exhaustive list of potential sources of conflict is provided below:

- Nominated examiners' substantial involvement in the student's research, for example direct and sustained input/advice into the work being examined. Acting as an independent assessor during the Annual Progress Review should not compromise the ability of an individual to act as internal examiner unless they undertake a more active role in the student's research.
- Close personal relationships between the nominated examiner and the student, supervisors, or other nominated examiner(s), for example this would include partners, spouses, and close family relationships.
- Close professional relationships between the nominated examiner and the student, supervisor, or other nominated examiner, for example line management relationships, joint holding of grants, frequent co-authorship of papers, or working in the same institution in the case of two external examiners. This may be mitigated by the size and relative independence of the research team.
- Nominated examiner(s) having acted as personal tutor to the student.
- The work of the nominated examiner(s) is the focus of the student's research.
- In cases where the student's research has involved collaboration with or funding of research by an external party, the nominated examiner(s) must be independent of that relationship.
- Nominated examiner(s) have direct commercial interest in the outcomes of the research.

The existence of a potential conflict of interest should not necessarily be a bar to the appointment of a nominated examiner. However, Faculties, examiners, supervisors, and students are required to declare any potential conflicts which may affect the integrity of the examination process at the point of nomination, or in the case of situations that only become apparent after examiners have been appointed, as soon as reasonably possible.

Criteria for the Appointment of the Internal Examiner

The internal examiner is a member of academic staff of the University of Wolverhampton and must hold a substantive appointment of at least 0.2 FTE or be regularly engaged as a Visiting Lecturer for more than 50% of their time or be an Emeritus Professor.

The internal examiner should be able to assess the thesis and contribute to the oral examination and must have a sound knowledge and understanding of university regulations and procedures governing the viva voce.

The internal examiner must have completed the formal 'Examining and Chairing a Research Degree' course within the last three years before being recommended for appointment as an internal examiner for the first time.

The internal examiner is normally a member of academic staff of the students' department/Faculty, although it may be appropriate for the internal examiner to be drawn from another academic department/Faculty.

The internal examiner should not have had an active role in considering a student's progression stage.

Criteria for the Appointment of the External Examiner

The external examiner is the subject specialist. External examiners must have recent, significant, and demonstrable expertise in the student's field of research in order to provide an in-depth analysis of the thesis and in order to provide a rigorous viva voce examination.

Except where there is a strong practitioner/ industrial focus to the research, the external examiner will normally hold a substantive academic appointment in a university or higher education establishment.

If the topic of research spans a number of different disciplines, the faculty may wish to nominate a second external examiner to ensure that the combined expertise of the examining team covers all aspects of the student's work.

The external examiner shall normally have prior knowledge and experience of research degree examinations and standards through previous examination experience. In exceptional circumstances an external examiner who is recognised as an expert in their subject discipline, but who has little or no formal examining experience, may be appointed if the combined proposed examining team has experience of 3 or more previous examinations.

The external examiner must be completely independent of both the University and any collaborating establishment. For this reason, honorary/Emeritus members of the University's staff are not permitted to be appointed as external examiners. Former members of the University's staff are eligible for appointment as an external examiner; however, a

period of at least 3 years must have elapsed before a former member of the University's staff may be appointed as an external examiner, subject to the other criteria being met.

An external examiner is not normally permitted to act in connection with the examination of a second research degree student at this University within a period of 12 months. The University Research Committee discourages the frequent use of external examiners except in exceptional cases and will ensure that the same external examiner is not approved so frequently that their familiarity with a research group might be considered to prejudice objective judgement.

Where a student is either sponsored by, receiving supervision from, or undertaking work in an industrial establishment, academic institution, or company, RASC will not approve an individual employed by that organisation for appointment as an external examiner.

Where the proposed external examiner does not meet the above criteria, the supervisor must make a strong case for appointment. In such cases: either

- a) the internal examiner must be very experienced in doctoral examinations at this University; **or**
- b) a second external examiner who is experienced in research degree examinations should be appointed.

The appointment of a nominated external examiner is subject to verification of their right to work in the UK.