

Guidance on the Appointment of Examiners

This guidance should be read in conjunction with section 12 of the [Policy on Research Degrees](#).

Examiners are formally appointed by the Research Degrees Progression and Award Board (RDPAB), acting on behalf of Senate. Unless a PGR is or has been a member of academic staff (grade 7 or above), at least one internal and one external examiner will be appointed. Where a PGR is or has been a member of academic staff (grade 7 or above), a minimum of two external examiners will be appointed, and an internal Independent Chair. In either case, additional examiners may be appointed where appropriate, e.g. where the thesis topic cannot be adequately covered by a single internal or external examiner. Where three examiners are appointed, normally two will be external.

Eligibility

All examiners must:

- not have played a role in the supervision of the PGR under examination
- possess a research degree or equivalent experience, have appropriate levels of expertise in the relevant research area, and be able to demonstrate that they are research active
- be impartial and not have any known conflict of interest which might impinge on their role; potential conflicts of interest must be considered and declared at the point of nomination

At least one of the examiners should have experience in research degree examination. If the proposed internal examiner has not conducted a research degree examination at Sussex, they should be briefed on the conduct of the viva and the University's examination procedures by a member of faculty, experienced in research examination at Sussex, and who has not played a role in supervising the PGR.

Internal examiners will normally be members of the University's Education and Research staff, other than the supervisor(s). The RDPAB has the authority to decide who qualifies as an internal examiner.

External examiners:

- Will normally be members of the academic staff of another higher education institution in the United Kingdom, or be of comparable academic or professional standing.
- May be appointed to examine no more than two PGR candidates in the same School in any 12-month period, and no more than four PGR candidates in the same School in any 36-month period.
- Where they are former members of staff or former students of the University, should not be invited to become external examiners until at least five years after their staff appointment has ceased, or the award of their degree, respectively.
- May be an external examiner for a taught degree programme at the University.

Impartiality

When nominating examiners, supervisors must reflect on and disclose any associations between the proposed examiners and the supervisors, between the examiners and the PGR, and between the examiners themselves. Declaring a potential conflict of interest does not necessarily preclude the use

of a particular examiner, but these must be declared and form part of the approval process. In some cases, the potential conflict of interest may be considered to be too significant for an examiner to be approved, however where appropriate, strategies for mitigation can be considered.

Potential conflicts of interest could include family or close personal relationships, shared publications or research grants, or other academic or professional collaborations. As a guide, examiners with shared publications or research grants either between themselves, or with supervisors, within the last 5 years would not normally be permitted. However, the questions on conflict of interest in the [Appointment of Examiners form](#) are intended to allow those proposing examiners a space to fully disclose the details, nature and context of any association, and – where relevant – explain why a perceivable conflict of interest is not material, and how it could be mitigated.

The [Seven Principles of Public Life](#) – or Nolan Principles – established by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, may provide a useful guide when considering potential conflicts of interest.

It is acknowledged that the combination of a small field and supervisors with large numbers of joint publications can make it problematic to find an examiner without any association. In these instances, a statement describing the context is required.

Supervisors are also asked to consider the expertise of the examining team as a whole, and if possible look beyond their home departments for internal examiners who, coupled with an external subject-expert, are able together to examine the standard of a thesis.

Appointment process

Supervisors are required to identify examiners and complete the [Appointment of Examiners form](#), including the declaration of any perceivable conflicts of interest, and then pass the form to the Director for PGRs (DPGR) for consideration. DPGR approval is required before the form is passed to the Examinations and Assessment team (researchexams@sussex.ac.uk) for putting to the RDPAB.

Supervisors or DPGRs are expected to make an informal approach to possible examiners and indicate those who are willing to serve in the [Appointment of Examiners form](#). However, it should be made clear during these approaches that nominations are subject to the approval of the RDPAB.

In addition to the [Appointment of Examiners form](#), an up-to-date CV is required for each external examiner. These will normally take the form of a traditional academic CV, but may take the form of an online profile where this provides the required information. The CV or profile must be up-to-date, span a minimum of five years, and include: publications; research grants and research activity; employment; and PGR supervision and examining experience.

The costs of the examination are borne by the School; colleagues should bear this in mind if suggesting an examiner based overseas. The Policy on Remote *Viva Voce* Examinations can be found in Appendix 3 of the [Policy on Research Degrees](#).