

Appointment of examiners and independent chairs for research degrees

UoL Graduate Board
Progression and Examinations Group

Please also refer to section 7.0 of this document for additional information relating to Leeds Trinity University as an accredited institution.

The **internal examiner** should normally;

1. Be a member of the academic or academic related staff.
2. Hold a permanent appointment of the University of at least 0.3 FTE.
3. In the last 5 years, have either completed UoL OD&PL course/briefing, or acted as internal examiner at Leeds.
4. Not have been involved in the supervision of the candidate.

The **external examiner** should normally:

1. Be a senior member of staff of a university or higher education establishment.
2. Have prior knowledge and experience of UK research degree examinations and standards through previous UK examination experience. For the purpose of this criteria 'Senior' is defined as Senior Lecturer (or equivalent) or above normally Grade 9.

The examiners must normally hold an independent position. 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 and experience of examining at least three 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. A case must be made to the Progression and Examinations Group (via the DoPGRS) where there are fewer than three UK examinations between the team of examiners. If a team of examiners cannot be found with the expected balance of seniority and experience then the University may require an **independent chair** (or a second internal examiner) to be appointed to ensure that the examination is conducted fairly and in accordance with University regulations.

To assist the Progression and Examinations Group in considering the examination experience across the team, details of the external examiner's previous UK PGR examination experience must be provided with the examination entry form.

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 Postgraduate Research Studies. The final decision about the appointment of Examiners is made by the UoL Progression and Examinations Group.

After the examination entry arrangements have been reviewed by the Progression and Examinations Group, DCO will advise LTU Research Office of any action that is needed, including any internal examiner training required, any briefing that must be provided to either examiner or if an Independent Chair will be required. The nomination for the Independent Chair should be made to by the Director of PGR Studies (in consultation with the Supervisor(s)) for approval by the Progression and Examinations Group.

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1.0 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, examples of what might constitute a close working/professional relationship: co-workers or co-authors on publications. 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 The [Code of Conduct for Professional Behaviours and Relationships](#) notes that staff will not put themselves in a position where their behaviour could trigger complaints a conflict of interest, even where such an outcome was not intended. For this reason, no individual who has a close personal relationship with the PGR under examination, or with the supervisor of the PGR under examination, should be appointed as an Examiner. A close personal relationship may include partners, spouses and close family relationships such as brothers, sisters or children.
- 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 and honorary title) and are still active in research.
- 1.4 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 normally only be given if an additional external examiner is also appointed to the examining team.
- 1.5 No recommendation for the appointment of an Examiner should be sent forward unless they have informally agreed to act.
- 1.6 The nomination of staff holding a visiting contract is dealt with on a case by basis.
- 1.7 Any proposals falling outside the areas indicated are referred to the Chair or other member of the Progression and Examinations Group for decision.

2.0 Criteria for the appointment of internal examiners

- 2.1 Supervisors must not be appointed as Examiners. Where the Internal Examiner was recorded as nominal supervisor during the first year of an Integrated PhD and MSc programme, consideration will be given to their appointment as internal examiner where it is confirmed they have had no involvement as supervisor of the PhD component.
- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 The Graduate Board requires all members of staff to complete a formal UoL 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. For those examiners who are experienced elsewhere but new to Leeds an online briefing may be offered as an alternative. Where it has

- been more than 5 years since a member of staff either acted as Internal Examiner or attended the UoL 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, another experienced member of the academic staff may be appointed to act as second (joint) internal examiner. The Board will not approve any future appointment as sole Internal Examiner until the training has been completed.
 - 2.5 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. Staff who are on fixed term contracts may be approved for appointment as sole internal examiner on a case-by-case basis (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).
 - 2.6 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.
 - 2.7 Honorary members of staff may serve as joint Internal Examiners. An honorary member of staff may, however, act as a sole internal examiner for the degrees of MD, DClinPsychol or DPaedDent provided they satisfy the other requirements for acting as an internal examiner. It will not be permitted for both the sole supervisor and sole internal examiner for a candidate to be honorary members of staff.
 - 2.8 An individual who has been involved in an Annual Progress Review (Post-Transfer) (under Model A) will not be eligible to act as the Internal Examiner for the final examination (it is the responsibility of the DoPGRS and Supervisors to ensure that an internal examiner has not acted as an independent assessor as part of the Annual Review Post-transfer). Involvement in the monitoring and oversight of progress, 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.
 - 2.9 An individual who has provided an independent academic assessment of a PGR's work as part of the Progress Support Policy Procedure may not normally then proceed to also act as the Internal Examiner in the final thesis examination.

Second (joint) internal examiner

- 2.10 In cases where a second (joint) Internal Examiner is appointed 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 the examination is performed in line with university 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 procedure, where appropriate, after the exam.
 - It is not necessary for both Internal Examiners to check any corrections to the thesis. The first Internal Examiner can undertake this task alone.

3.0 Criteria for the appointments of external examiners

- 3.1 Individuals appointed as external examiners must be independent of the University and of the Faculty/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 members of staff of a university or higher education establishment (Senior Lecturer, or equivalent or normally grade 9 or above).
- 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), Supervisors and the DoPGRS are required to make a special case for appointment. In such cases either
- (i) the internal examiner must be a senior member of staff with previous examination experience at this University or elsewhere in the UK (normally at least 3 UK examinations); and
 - (ii) the external will be required to undergo a briefing to familiarise them with the requirements of the UK system and the expectations of the University. or

- (iii) a second (joint) external examiner who is experienced in UK research degree examinations should be appointed to act as co-external on this occasion;
- 3.4 A period of 5 years must normally have elapsed before a former member of the University's staff may be appointed as an external examiner.
- 3.5 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.
- 3.6 Individuals holding honorary appointments within the University may not act as external examiners but may be considered for appointment as joint internal examiner.
- 3.7 Where a PGR is either sponsored by, receiving supervision from, or undertaking work in an industrial establishment, academic institution or company, the Progression and Examinations Group will not 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.
- 3.8 Where the PGR is registered on a collaborative programme (commonly part of a Centre for Doctoral Training) the normal expectation is that the external examiner will be from outside the collaborative institutions involved in the delivery of the programme unless a case can be made based on the academic expertise required and the independence of the external examiner from the individual PGR and their research project, and from the programme, can be demonstrated.
- 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. At least one Internal Examiner is required in all cases. Exceptions are as follows:
 - 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 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.

4.0 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 6 examining experience or seniority. Examples of when a Chair will normally be appointed include:
- Where the internal will be undertaking their first research degree examination in the UK.
 - Where neither the external or internal examiner holds a senior academic position.
 - Where there are less than 3 previous UK PGR exams 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 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 senior member of staff of Leeds (Senior Lecturer or above, normally Grade 9 or above) from a cognate discipline but not necessarily from the same School, with significant and recent experience of research degree examinations at Leeds/LTU. 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. (Other Leeds examination experience could be taken into account when considering any nominations which fall below the published criteria. This might include acting as DoPGRS or as a member of the Progression & Examinations Group)
 - 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 all the necessary paperwork to the Research & Knowledge Exchange Office (research@leedstrinity.ac.uk).
- 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.

4.3 The Independent Chair is not expected to

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

- 4.4 An Independent Chair may be appointed, at the request of the examining team because of the video-streaming format of the viva. Where the team is otherwise experienced in UK research degree examinations, separate [criteria](#) will be applied.

5.0 Training for internal examiners

- 5.1 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. For further information please see the [OD&PL website](#), to register to attend the training please contact the Research & Knowledge Exchange office research@leedstrinity.ac.uk:

- **For those new to the role:** The Role of the Internal Examiner: delivered by academic members of staff who are current or former members of the Progression and 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): Online briefing: Update for experienced internal examiners.

- 5.2 In exceptional situations where a new internal examiner is unable to attend the full Role of the Internal Examiner workshop before the viva takes place, the Progression and Examinations Group will give consideration to the following alternative arrangements (subject to the agreement of the Director of PGR Studies). The internal examiner will be required to:
- (a) Work through both the SWAYs (part 1 and part 2) used in the Role of the Internal Examiner workshops.
 - (b) Meet with their Director of PGR Studies to discuss how they are preparing for the viva.
 - (c) Attend the next instance of the Role of the Internal Examiner workshop so that they have opportunity to discuss the case studies.

6.0 Briefings for Examiners

- 6.1 Where an internal examiner has 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 DoPGRS or nominee before the viva. This forms part of the University's quality assurance processes as an alternative to the appointment of an independent chair.
- 6.2 Where the external examiner will be undertaking their first appointment as an external examiner in the UK a briefing must be provided by the Internal examiner/Independent chair before the viva.
- 6.3 Guidance is also available on our web pages [briefing for an external examiner](#). The briefing guidance is not intended as a prescriptive list but suggests areas and topics which might be covered. It should be a dialogue with the opportunity for questions and must be provided by a senior colleague with experience as Internal Examiner who is independent of the candidature and the examination.

7.0 Arrangements for candidates registered at Leeds Trinity University (accredited institution)

- 7.1 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:
 - (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. Supervisors must not be appointed as Examiners.

Where an Accredited Institution staff member will be acting as internal examiner for the first time a member of University of Leeds staff will normally be appointed as second internal examiner in accordance with (b (1)) above, (or an experienced member of the Institution on a case by case basis). Where an Accredited Institution staff member will be appointed as internal examiner for the first time but is an experienced examiner elsewhere the guidance below can be considered where the Progression and 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 the training course for research degree internal examiners, as provided by University of Leeds OD&PL in the past 60 months;
- have previously supervised a PGR 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.

University of Leeds equivalent policy version 6.0, September 2023:

https://ses.leeds.ac.uk/download/downloads/id/648/criteria_for_the_appointment_of_examiners_and_independent_chairs.pdf