

Guidelines on nominating examiners for MPhil and PhD examinations

For use when completing the Examination Entry form

Introduction

1. The examination entry form should be completed and submitted to the PhD Academy **at least two months in advance of the thesis being submitted** to allow sufficient time for the process to be completed so that once the thesis has been received it can be sent immediately to the examiners. The process of approving and appointing examiners can sometimes be lengthy, for example, if the RDSC subject panel reject the original examiner nominations, new nominations will need to be made. It is therefore very important to submit the exam entry form, fully complete, at least 2 months prior to the submission of the thesis.
2. Examiners must be formally approved before arrangements for the viva are initiated and an examiner should have at least a month between receipt of the thesis and the viva date to read the thesis. In practice, this means that **a minimum of 6 weeks should be allowed between either submission of the thesis or confirmation of the formal appointment of the examiners (whichever is later) and the date of the viva.**
3. The [Regulations for Research Degrees](#) (paragraphs 64-67) require the appointment of:
two, or exceptionally three, examiners for each candidate. The examiners are required to be experts in the field of the thesis and to be able to make an independent assessment of the candidate and the thesis. At least one examiner will be external to LSE (in the exceptional case of three examiners at least two of them will be independent of LSE). The panel of examiners are required to demonstrate that the examination is subject to clear independent oversight of LSE procedures and assessment and that there is a sufficient experience of LSE expectations and requirements. The candidate's supervisors or advisers may not be examiners.

Where an examination panel cannot be constituted with sufficient experience of LSE expectations and requirements the department may either:

- a) Nominate a third examiner with appropriate experience; or*
- b) Nominate a[n internal] chair to be appointed from within the academic department to oversee regulations for the examination. The [internal] chair will not take part in academic assessment of the work at viva and their role is limited to ensuring regulatory compliance of the examination process.*

Research Degrees Subcommittee advises that:

- If there is an issue with examiner association with the supervisor/the academic department/the School (e.g. being affiliated with a LSE Research Centre), then an additional independent voice is required and a third examiner should be nominated
- If there is an issue of the examiners being the appropriate subject experts, having sufficient independence, but not being knowledgeable with LSE expectations and procedures (e.g., examiners lacking UK examining experience) then there is a requirement for a chair from the department to be nominated to ensure procedural advice is provided but who will not be involved in the academic assessment.

4. Supervisors are asked to nominate appropriate examiners (by completing the relevant sections of the Examination Entry form) that meet the School's criteria: the notes below are intended to assist in the nomination process. The Doctoral Programme Director will need to confirm they are content with the nominations made by the supervisor by signing the examination entry form.
5. It is not the responsibility of candidates to nominate their own examiners and candidates do not have the right to request and have appointed examiners of their choosing. However, it is usual for a supervisor to consult with the candidate about potential examiners, in particular to establish whether there is any connection between the candidate and the examiner(s) (see paragraphs 19-20 below).

Completing the examination entry form

6. The candidate, with guidance from their supervisor, should ensure they provide a comprehensive and clear abstract on the relevant section of the examination entry form. The abstract should be written in a manner accessible to non-subject experts and in plain English. The candidate should ensure that they fully understand the declaration they are asked to sign – further guidance on this can be sought from the PhD Academy Manager (Dr Pete Mills; P.B.Mills@lse.ac.uk).
7. The supervisor will need to ensure they make an articulate case for the choice of particular examiners. It is assumed that nominated examiners will be experts in their field therefore the supervisor should give **specific reasons** for the choice of that particular examiner in relation to their particular academic expertise. This is to assist the Subject Panel in their consideration of the suitability of the examiners.
8. The supervisor will need to check whether there are any academic and/or personal connections between a candidate and an examiner and declare this on the examination entry form. **Any connection between a candidate and an examiner and any connection between a supervisor and an examiner must be declared in full on the Examination Entry Form.**
9. Additionally, the supervisor will need to confirm how many previous MPhil/PhD examinations each examiner has conducted and indicate this on the relevant section of the form. The supervisor will also need to confirm whether each examiner has had previous experience of PhD examining in the UK (as distinct from PhD examining experience in other countries).
10. The Panel considering the examiner nominations are unable to do so if information provided is incomplete. The PhD Academy will return any incomplete forms to the supervisor, which may cause delays to the examination process. Supervisors are therefore asked to provide full information in all sections of the form.

Examiners

11. The Research Degrees Subcommittee will appoint the examiners, having paid particular attention to their independence, expertise and relevant experience. It will appoint two, or exceptionally three, examiners for each candidate.
12. The examiners are required to be experts in the field of the thesis and to be able to make an independent assessment of the candidate and the thesis.
13. At least one examiner will be external to LSE (in the exceptional case of three examiners, normally at least two of them will be independent of LSE). The panel of examiners are required to demonstrate that the examination is subject to clear independent oversight of LSE procedures and assessment and that there is a sufficient

experience of LSE expectations and requirements.

14. Where an examination panel cannot be constituted with sufficient experience of LSE expectations and requirements the department may either:
- a) Nominate a third examiner with appropriate experience; or
 - b) Nominate a chair to be appointed from within the academic department to oversee regulations for the examination. The chair will not take part in academic assessment of the work at the viva and their role is limited to ensuring regulatory compliance of the examination process.

Where a third examiner or an internal chair is required, supervisors should make a case to the RDSC by completing the relevant section of the exam entry form.

15. Where an examiner has been a member of staff at the LSE, a period of at least three years must have passed since they left the LSE before they can be classed as an external examiner and act in this capacity. This also applies to a member of academic staff who has been a Visiting Professor at the LSE. For the purposes of examiner classification, nominated external examiners who are affiliated with a LSE research centre are classed as internal examiners.
- This means that if one internal examiner and one external examiner, who is affiliated with a LSE (either via research centre or who has previously been a member of staff at the LSE within the last three years), are being nominated then both nominees will be classed as internal to the LSE. As is it not permissible to nominate two internal examiners, a third external examiner with no affiliations to the LSE or close connections to the supervisor and/or candidate, will need to be nominated as part of the nomination process.
 - This means that if two external examiners, who are both affiliated with a LSE (either via a research center or who have previously been a member of staff at the LSE within the last three year) are being nominated, then both nominees will be classed as internal to the LSE. As is it not permissible to nominate two internal examiners, a third external examiner with no affiliations to the LSE or close connections to the supervisor and/or candidate, will need to be nominated as part of the nomination process.
16. Retired members of academic staff, who are still active in their fields, can usually act as examiners. Their institutional affiliation, in terms of whether they will be considered an internal or external examiner, will be that of their last employer.

Expertise and experience of the examiners

17. Both examiners should be experts in the field of the thesis although not necessarily in all parts of the precise topic. Many theses are interdisciplinary and the aim should be to appoint examiners who, between them, cover all aspects of the work to be presented by the candidate. It is usual that both examiners will be members of academic staff in a higher education institution (see paragraph 15 above on retired staff) and this can include Visiting Professors.
18. Between them examiners are required to be familiar with the UK MPhil/PhD examining process, including experience of conducting MPhil/PhD examinations previously. The supervisor will be asked to confirm the amount of prior examining experience each examiner has on the examination entry form. It is accepted that an academic has to examine an MPhil/PhD thesis for the first time; if such a person is nominated, they should be paired with an experienced examiner. Where this is not possible, the supervisor can request for a third examiner with UK examining experience to be nominated or can request for an internal chair to be present at the viva.

Independence

19. It is accepted that examiners will usually be acquainted with the supervisor, and sometimes the candidate, and this in itself is not a bar to acting as an examiner. The supervisor must declare in full any academic and/or personal connections on the examination entry form. All connections will be considered by the Research Degrees Subcommittee's Subject Panel before an examiner can be appointed.
20. a. The examiners appointed should have had no direct involvement in the candidate's research or close connections with either the supervisor or the candidate that might inhibit a completely objective examination. It is not possible to specify all instances where close connections will prevent a potential examiner from being considered as independent. However previous nominations have been rejected on the basis of the following:
 - (i) the internal examiner also being the Doctoral Programme Director and from the same department as the candidate;
 - (ii) an examiner also being a member of the candidate's supervisory team;
 - (iii) an internal examiner who had been involved in the candidate's upgrade decision;
 - (iv) an examiner who had also been the candidate's tutor on a previous degree;
 - (v) a candidate who was holding a job offer from the same academic department as either of the nominated examiners;
 - (vi) an examiner who had written a reference for the candidate in support of an application for funding;
 - (vii) where an external examiner was affiliated with a Research Centre at LSE. (Please refer to point 14 of the above for further information on this); and
 - (viii) an examiner who was the supervisor of a candidate that co-authored a paper that appears in the candidate's thesis.
- b. Where connections have existed but were deemed by the Subject Panel as not strong enough to bar the examiner from acting have included (but are not limited to):
 - (i) the candidate had met the examiner at a conference where they had spoken briefly about his/her thesis;
 - (ii) the internal examiner was based in the same department as the candidate/supervisor;
 - (iii) the examiner had supervised the candidate's supervisor, but more than 5 years ago;
 - (iv) the candidate's supervisor had supervised the examiner, but more than 5 years ago;
 - (v) the examiner had co-authored a paper with the supervisor, but the paper had been written more than 5 years previously; and
 - (vi) the examiners and the supervisors were known to each other as experts within the field.

What happens next?

21. Once the examination entry form has been submitted, the PhD Academy will send the examiner nominations to the appropriate Subject Panel of the Research Degrees Subcommittee for approval. Where the Subject Panel has any concerns over particular nominations, the PhD Academy will contact the supervisor in the first instance for further information.
22. On approval of the nominations, the PhD Academy will formally contact the examiners to ask if they are willing and able to act. Once confirmation from them has been received, the PhD Academy will confirm to the candidate and their supervisor that the examiners have been formally appointed. At that stage, it is expected that the supervisor will begin to make the relevant arrangements for the viva (please see the [Guidelines on MPhil/PhD Examinations](#) for further information).
23. Once examiners are approved and the thesis is submitted, the thesis will be sent out by the PhD Academy to the examiners within 1-2 weeks. This can take longer at peak times. As with paragraph 2 above, examiners should have a minimum of one month to read the thesis.
24. The examiner nomination process cannot be accelerated. When examiners are appointed in unseemly haste and examinations are set with little time for serious consideration of the material being assessed, there is a risk of undermining the reputation of our PhD examination process.

Research Degrees Subcommittee
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