



# PhD Academy: Guidelines on nominating examiners for MPhil and PhD examinations

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## Guidelines on nominating examiners for MPhil and PhD examinations

### 1.1. *Introduction*

- 1.1.1. The examination entry form should be completed and submitted to the PhD Academy **at least 40 working days/eight working weeks before the thesis is submitted**. This is to allow sufficient time for the examiner nomination and appointment process to be completed so that once the thesis has been received it can be sent out in a timely manner to the examiners. Departments should be aware that the process of approving and appointing examiners can sometimes be lengthy. For example, if the Research Degrees Sub-Committee (RDSC) subject panel do not accept the originally nominated examination panel, new nominations will need to be made. It is therefore very important to submit the exam entry form, fully complete, at least 40 working days/eight working weeks before the submission of the thesis.
- 1.1.2. Examiners must be formally approved before arrangements for the viva are initiated. Examiners should have at least 20 working days/four working weeks between receipt of the thesis and the viva date to read the thesis. **In practice, this means that a minimum of 30 working days/6 working weeks should be allowed between either submission of the thesis or formal confirmation that the examiners have been appointed (whichever is later) and the proposed date of the viva.**
- 1.1.3. The *Regulations for Research Degrees* (paragraphs 57-60) state the following.
- 1.1.3.1. [57] 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. The candidate's supervisors cannot act as examiners. [58]. The examiners are required to be experts in the field of the thesis and to be able to make an independent assessment of the student and the thesis. [59]. 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 sufficient experience of LSE expectations and requirements. [60.] 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 viva and their role is limited to ensuring regulatory compliance of the examination process. The candidate's supervisors cannot act as Chair to the examination
- 1.1.4. The Research Degrees Subcommittee advises as follows.
- i. If both examiners are associated with the School in any significant way, then an additional independent voice is required. Therefore, the examination form should propose a third examiner without links to the School.
  - ii. 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. 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.

- 1.1.5. 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.
- 1.1.6. 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 examiners.
- 1.2. *Completing the examination entry form*
- 1.2.1. The candidate, with guidance from their supervisory team, 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's Research Degrees Management team ([phdacademy@lse.ac.uk](mailto:phdacademy@lse.ac.uk)).
- 1.2.2. The supervisory team 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. Accordingly, 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.
- 1.2.3. Additionally, the supervisory team will need to confirm how many previous MPhil and/or 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).
- 1.2.4. The Subject Panel considering the examiner nominations are unable to do so if information provided is incomplete. Accordingly, 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.
- 1.3. *Examiners*
- 1.3.1. 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.
- 1.3.2. 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.
- 1.3.3. **There is no requirement for any member of the examination panel to be an LSE or University of London employee. At minimum, one examiner must 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.

- 1.3.4. For the purposes of these guidelines, an internal examiner is either:
- i. a current LSE employee, including Visiting Professors and LSE research centre affiliates, including affiliates without other formal employment relationships to LSE, or;
  - ii. a former LSE employee, as defined under (i), including retired members of staff who left the School *less than* three years from the point at which the nomination form is submitted.
- 1.3.5. All other examiners are classed as external examiners. For the avoidance of doubt, employees of University of London member institutions are not considered internal examiners unless they meet the criteria set out in points (i-ii) above.
- 1.3.6. Examples are provided below.
- i. If one internal examiner and one other examiner who is *otherwise* external but is also either (a) a former LSE member of staff who departed within the last three years, or (b) affiliated with an LSE research centre are nominated, both will be classed as internal examiners. As it is 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, or an alternative examination panel will need to be nominated.
  - ii. If two otherwise external examiners who are either (a) former LSE members of staff who departed within the last three years or (b) affiliated with an LSE research centre are nominated, both nominees will be classed as internal examiners. As it is 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, or an alternative examination panel will need to be nominated.
- 1.4. *Expertise and experience of the examiners*
- 1.4.1. 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. This can include Visiting Professors.
- 1.4.2. Between them, the examiners are required to be familiar with the UK MPhil/PhD examining process, including previous experience of conducting MPhil/PhD examinations. The supervisory team 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 supervisory team can nominate a third examiner with UK examining experience or can ask for an internal chair to be present at the viva.

- 1.4.3. It is accepted that examiners will usually be acquainted with the supervisor, and sometimes the candidate. This is not, of itself, a bar to their 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.
- 1.4.3.1. The appointed examiners 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. an 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 15 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.
- 1.4.3.2. 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.

1.5. *What happens next?*

- 1.5.1.1. Once the examination entry form has been submitted [here](#), 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.
- 1.5.1.2. 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).
- 1.5.1.3. 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.
- 1.5.1.4. 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.

## Version log

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Yearly	July 2025	August 2025

## Version history

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22-23.01	August 2021	Research Degrees Sub-Committee	Extant policy.
23-24.01	16/04/2024	Research Degrees Sub-Committee Chair	Move to new standard template. Re-numbering throughout.
24-25.01	30/09/2024	PhD Academy Assistant Manager (Casework and Advice)	Introduction of direct quote from Regulations 57-60 of the Regulations for Research Degrees.

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## Feedback

Mechanism description	Mechanism access details
Email	<a href="mailto:phdacademy@lse.ac.uk">phdacademy@lse.ac.uk</a>

## Communications and Training

Query	Answer	Notes
Will this document be publicised through internal communications?	<u>Yes/No</u>	Publication on the PhD Academy website, email notification to doctoral programme directors, and discussion at the next Doctoral Programme Directors' Forum.
Will training needs arise from this document?	<u>Yes/No</u>	