

Role and Remit of an Independent Chair of a Viva-Voce examination for a research award of the university

Criteria for the appointment of Independent Chairs

A faculty, in proposing an Independent Chair, should seek a person who fulfils the following:

Has previously engaged with the Research examination process in more than one of the following roles:

- An internal or external examiner
- A supervisor who has successfully guided a student through, the Confirmation of Registration process
- Is experienced in the research award regulations of the university (Section G of the Academic Principles and Regulations)
- Is of appropriate seniority to confidently engage with the examiners, many of whom will be distinguished scholars in their field
- Has significant meeting skills
- Is able to deal with difficult circumstances with confidence and firmness.

Those already on the list of approved Independent Chairs recommended to Chair a specific research examination by a faculty will also have had no direct involvement with the candidate under examination or their supervision and will not work within the same School of the university as the candidate.

Approved Independent Chairs

Faculty proposals for Independent Chairs will be considered by the Research Degrees Sub-Committee of the University Research and Enterprise Committee. Proposals for inclusion on the list of approved Independent Chairs may be made at any time in the academic year.

A list of all approved Independent Chairs will be maintained. The list will be reviewed on a three-yearly cycle.

Applications for, and addition to, the list of approved Independent Chairs must take place prior to the individual being proposed as an Independent Chair for the examination of a candidate.

Staff Development

Any person accepting nomination as an Independent Chair must be willing to participate in appropriate staff development as organised by the University.

Role of an Independent Chair

An Independent Chair is primarily responsible for ensuring that :

- All viva-voce examinations are conducted in accordance with our University Academic Principles and Regulations
- All requirements for amendments or re-submission (as appropriate) are agreed by the examiners and clearly conveyed to candidates before the conclusion of the examination.
- The date for submission of any amendments or re-submission is set and agreed by the examiners
- All relevant information is sent to the respective parties in a timely way

An Independent Chair is not an examiner. An Independent Chair will not participate in any decision on the academic merit of the thesis, which is the responsibility of the examiners.

Responsibilities of an Independent Chair include the following:

Prior to the viva

The Independent Chair will:

- Acquaint themselves with the thesis
- Read the preliminary reports of the examiners in order to consider how the process of examination might best be carried out (in particular deciding whether a meeting between the examiners may be required in the case of an MRes examination).

During the Viva

The Independent Chair will

- Chair the proceedings
- Ensure that due process is followed and that the student is offered a full opportunity to defend his or her thesis
- Ask questions of the student or the examiners where the purpose of this is to elucidate or clarify due process during the viva
- Give regulatory guidance
- Ensure all Academic Outcomes are determined in accordance with our University Academic Principles and Regulations and any relevant procedures
- Ensure all outcomes, including the requirements for amendments or re-submission are agreed and clearly conveyed to the candidate before the conclusion of the viva

After the Viva

- Provide the details of the outcome of the examination are provide to the University Research Office as soon as possible after the viva
- Check and sign relevant correspondence to be sent to the candidate regarding the outcome of the examination for accuracy
- Be available to the candidate if they have queries about the outcome of the examination, providing clarification where necessary.
- Act as the intermediary between the candidate and examiners where required (candidates are not permitted to contact examiners directly). Ensuring that an agreed response from the examiners can be sent to the candidate
- Ensure due process is followed in respect of our University Academic Principles and Regulations and any relevant procedures

Independent Chairs are expected to be fully conversant with Section G of our University Academic Principles and Regulations and the 'Quality Manual for Research Degree Programmes'.

Independent Chairs will help to clarify, for the benefit of the examiners and the candidate, the meaning of the available outcomes (details contained within Section 12 of the 'Quality Manual for Research Degree Programmes').

Disagreement between Examiners

In the event of disagreement between the examiners, the Independent Chair will seek to reach an agreed conclusion.

In the event of the examiners failing to reach agreement, ensuring that the examiners understand the requirements of the university for individual reports and recommendations such as to enable the Research Sub-Committee to satisfy itself that due process has been followed.

Duration of Role

The Independent Chair will act in this capacity throughout the examination process of the student in question, including any re-submission.

The Independent Chair may be called upon to comment or give evidence to any Appeal Hearing granted in respect of the outcome of an examination process.