

Notes and Guidance for the Appointment, Criteria and Duties of an Independent Chair for Higher Degree by Research *viva voce* Examinations

Independent Chairs are appointed to examinations for certain circumstances which fall within the guidelines of our Research Regulations. Therefore, not all examinations will have an Independent Chair, but for those which do the Independent Chair plays an important role.

Circumstances when to Appoint an Independent Chair

The [Regulations for Research Degrees](#) covers these in detail under 11.6

Criteria for the Appointment of an Independent Chair

An Independent Chair must:

- i. Be a member of the University staff (Emeritus Professor is acceptable)
- ii. Not be from the candidate's research subject area, and normally not from the same school
- iii. Not have been involved with the candidate's research at any stage
- iv. Have experience of at least 2 previous research oral examinations (as Internal or External), at least one of which should have been conducted at the University of Portsmouth
- v. Have experience in the successful supervision of research degree students to completion

The Independent Chair must not have been part of the candidate's supervisory team or an assessor for progression; they should not have published with or sought external finance with, or delivered a joint conference paper with the candidate during the period of the candidate's registration.

Procedure to Appoint an Independent Chair

Where an Independent Chair is requested or required by the regulations the Research Degrees team will inform the relevant Faculty Director for Postgraduate Research (FDPGR) who will then appoint a member of academic staff to the role.

Research Degrees will confirm the appointment of the Independent Chair to the candidate, First Supervisor, examiners and Independent Chair noting the regulation under which the appointment is required.

Role of an Independent Chair

The role of an Independent Chair is to oversee the oral examination (and presentation, where applicable) to ensure this is conducted fairly and in accordance with the University Regulations.

The Independent Chair is not required to have any knowledge of the thesis or the discipline area and, although sits in on the deliberations of the examiners when the First Supervisor and candidate are not present, is not involved with the Examiners' assessment of the candidate.

Arrangements for an Independent Chair

The First Supervisor will be expected to liaise with the Independent Chair regarding the arrangements for the oral examination (and presentation, where applicable), as well as with the examiners.

Research Degrees will provide the Independent Chair with the Independent Chair Guidance and the relevant documents for the examination shortly after their appointment.

The Independent Chair will not be provided with a copy of the thesis but may request one from the First Supervisor should they choose.

The candidate cannot appeal against the decision to appoint an Independent Chair or ask for an alternative Independent Chair. The complaints process will be accessible for candidates, if required.

If the examiners' decision is for resubmission that involves a second oral examination then an Independent Chair is also required for this. Where possible, this should be the same Independent Chair as for the initial viva.

Duties of an Independent Chair

- i. Familiarise themselves with the Independent Chair Guidance sent by Research Degrees
- ii. Host the pre-viva meeting for the examiners
- iii. Discuss with the examiners a format and agenda for the oral examination
- iv. Oversee the oral examination (and presentation, where applicable) to ensure the examination procedures are followed and conducted fairly
- v. Ensure any approved Reasonable Adjustments for the student are accommodated during the examination
- vi. Ensure that the candidate is given the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, defend their thesis and respond to all questions asked by the examiners
- vii. Ensure that each of the examiners has the opportunity to contribute to the examination process
- viii. Ensure that where the First Supervisor is present at the oral examination they only act as an observer and are not present for the examiners' deliberations
- ix. Ensure that the examiners inform the candidate of their decision and give a verbal report on any amendments (if necessary)
- x. Ensure that the examiners complete and sign the UP7B form confirming their recommendation for the candidate and ensure that this is returned to researchdegrees@port.ac.uk within 24 hours
- xi. Remind the examiners of the requirements for compiling the joint report following the decision for resubmission and to do so within the specified time (normally 10 working days)
- xii. Complete an Independent Chair report following the conclusion of the oral examination

Independent Chair's Report

The Independent Chair must provide a report on the viva. The report is to include a brief account of how the oral examination was conducted, an indication of whether or not the event was sound and fair, confirmation of the examiners' recommendation, and any other points to note relating to the event. The report should be sent to researchdegrees@port.ac.uk within 10 working days of the viva taking place.

Administrative Contacts

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