

Faculty of Science

Guidelines for Selecting Examiners for PhD and MSc Vivas.

Examiners need to be chosen with reference to their credentials both as subject-specialists and as assessors of PhD and MSc theses in this country. Please refer to the [Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes](#) (pdf, 247 KB) for general advice relating to the appointment of internal and external examiners and their respective roles and duties.

Criteria for Appointment of Examiners

Judging whether a particular person is of a sufficient standing, *as a subject-specialist*, to assess a particular thesis is primarily a matter for the Supervisor and Head of Department. At Faculty level, we are primarily concerned to confirm that the examiners have the necessary credentials *as assessors*. This involves a check on their general status as academics as well as their past experience of assessment. Note that examiners who have little or no experience are often poorly calibrated and can be either too lenient or too harsh – both of which can present a significant problem. To ensure that the examiners you propose meet a minimum standard in terms of their examining experience and current academic status, please ensure that they meet following criteria:

1. Both examiners have PhDs.
2. Both examiners are currently bona fide employees, with full academic status, of a degree-awarding institution.
3. The examiners between them have, in the past, assessed *a minimum of 5 theses*.
4. The external examiner has some prior experience. (see below)

Prior Experience

Note that prior experience can be either as internal or as external examiner.

The prior experience should ideally be of the same type of thesis (i.e. UK MSc or PhD) as is to be assessed on this occasion.

Exceptions

Deviations from these guidelines can only occur with permission of the Graduate Dean. It must be recognised that, if the examiners do not fit the above criteria, there is a potential weakness in the credibility of the assessment. It is therefore important to ensure that in such a case there are no other foreseeable weaknesses. Issues to consider are:

- Is it possible to identify other examiners who meet the above criteria and could satisfactorily conduct the viva?
- Are there significant weaknesses in the thesis?
- If the external examiner has no prior experience, is his/her appointment combined with an inexperienced internal examiner? (Note that 'inexperienced' could mean either as a subject-specialist or as an examiner.)
- Are there any other possible special needs or complications that might affect the assessment of the thesis and the conduct of the viva?
- Is there a language problem?

If the answer to *any* of the above is 'yes', then you should seek different examiners.

If the answer to *all* of the above is 'no', then you could consider making a special case. This must be made in writing and submitted along with the appointment of examiners form.

Emeritus and Other

Occasionally, staff want to appoint examiners who do not meet criterion 2. A person might fall into this category if they are, for example, an Emeritus Professor, an academic who is currently unemployed, or an employee of a research institute or a commercial company. If you wish to appoint such an examiner, then please follow the course of action proposed under 'Exceptions'.

Moreover, please provide a brief CV of the individual to demonstrate that

1. they had the appropriate academic status when last employed or that their current status is equivalent to that of academic status, and
2. they have recently been research active (i.e. that their subject knowledge can be expected to be up to date).

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Graduate Dean
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