

Introduction

These notes set out the arrangements for the examination of research degrees for the awards of

- Master of Philosophy (MPhil) (level 7)
- Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) (level 8)
- Doctor of Engineering (EngD) (level 8)
- Doctor of Medicine (Research) (MD (Res)) (level 8)

The notes may also be helpful to examiners of (level 8) Professional Clinical Doctorate programmes (e.g., DCinDent, DClinSurg, DClinMed, etc.).

Please read these notes before conducting the examination.

Key points:

- (a) The viva convenor is responsible for organising the viva and will contact the examiners to make the arrangements. The viva convenor is usually the student's primary supervisor or another member of the student's supervisory team or academic staff.
- (b) The Research Degrees Office ([RDO](#)) sends the thesis to the examiners by email.
- (c) This clause does not apply for DClin programmes, as schools manage their examination. Whereas for all other research programmes, only the Research Degrees Office is authorised to send the thesis to the examiners. The student or their supervisor must not send the thesis to the examiners. The examination may be declared invalid if they do so. Please contact the Research Degrees Office if this happens.
- (d) The viva may be held remotely with all participants attending online or face to face on a Queen Mary campus, in line with health and safety and travel guidance in place on the day of the viva. All participants must agree the format of the viva. One examiner can attend remotely, if the student and other examiner can attend in person together.
- (e) Examiners read and consider the "Queen Mary guidance to examiners on taking account of the disruption caused by Covid-19 in examining a thesis" in [annexe A](#).
- (f) Examiners use the Examiner Portal in [MySIS](#), linked to the student records system, to report the examination outcome and upload their preliminary and final joint examination reports. Please see the [Research-Examiner-MySIS-User-Guide](#).
- (g) The examiners must complete and submit the outcome reports on the [MySIS](#) Examiner Portal, within two weeks of the examination. Please contact [RDO](#) if this is not possible.

Please contact the [RDO](#) if you have any queries, and if your login credentials for the MySIS Examiner Portal need to be re-issued.

Nomination and appointment of examiners and eligibility to examine

1. Please read [annex B](#) for information about nominations and appointments of examiners.

Notes on reasonable adjustments for the examination

2. The educational needs provision of the Equality Act 2010 requires institutions to make reasonable adjustments for candidates with physical and special learning differences in their assessment.
3. If students need to discuss any specific learning differences, please contact the QMUL [Disability and Dyslexia Service](#).
4. Candidates are asked to inform the [RDO](#), at the time of examination entry (or as soon as possible afterwards) if they require any special arrangements to be made.
5. Examiners will be advised of any such arrangements with their appointment letters, or as soon as the [RDO](#) gets notified by the student, or by a healthcare professional, on the student's behalf.
6. Supervisors and students should not inform examiners of any special arrangements directly. It should be communicated formally by the [RDO](#).

Organisation of the oral examination

7. The viva convenor is responsible for organising the oral examination. This is usually the student's supervisory team or a nominated member of QMUL staff. They will contact the examiners and the student to identify and confirm a mutually convenient time for the oral examination. They notify the [RDO](#) of the date of the oral examination, so that the RDO can email the thesis to the examiners, in good time before the viva.
8. Supervisors must record the viva date on [MySIS](#). Please go to the *Research Student data* tab and retrieve the record for the student using *Research Student Lookup* functionality. The task for adding the viva date is on the student's home page, in the *Thesis* section.
9. All documents for the examination, including the thesis, are sent to the examiners by the Research Degrees Office ([RDO](#)). If the **candidate contacts the examiners**, or if either the **candidate or the supervisor sends the thesis to the examiners**, the examination may be declared **invalid**. Examiners must contact the Research Degrees Office if they are contacted by the candidate, or if they receive a copy of the thesis directly from the candidate or supervisor.
10. If the external examiner requires a hardcopy of the thesis, please contact the [RDO](#), with the address to which you would like us to post the thesis.
11. The oral examination is normally held at Queen Mary, with the candidate and the examiners present in person. It may also be held online, with the candidate and the examiners all attending remotely, or organised as a mixed mode of attendance. All participants must agree on the format of the viva. For a mixed mode viva, either the candidate or one of the examiners may attend the examination by video-link. In such cases an independent chair (if required) or viva convenor must be in attendance, with those attending in person, for the duration of the examination. One examiner can attend remotely if the student and other examiner can attend in person together.

12. If it is proposed that the viva is held outside London, the supervisor must contact the [RDO](#) to explain the reasons for this, and seek approval.
13. The supervisor may attend the oral examination, as an observer, where the candidate indicates on the MySIS examination entry form that they permit this.

Preliminary Independent Reports

14. Each examiner will author an independent preliminary report on the thesis, in advance of the oral examination, but before conferring with the co-examiner about it.
15. Typically, the preliminary report identifies areas which the examiner intends to explore with the candidate during the oral examination. The report can also make an initial recommendation for the result of the examination, based on an assessment of the thesis. These recommendations should not be shared with the candidate, in advance of the oral examination; except when the examiners are asked to do so, by the [RDO](#), based on adjustments recommended at a disability assessment of the candidate (as described clause 15, below, about reasonable adjustments in line with the Equality Act 2010).
16. The examiners should exchange their preliminary reports with each other before conducting the oral examination. The examiner should also upload these to the [MySIS](#) Examiner Portal, before the viva.

Queries and special arrangements for the examination

17. If the examiners have any queries about the thesis, which they wish to raise with the supervisor, in advance of the oral examination, they may do so.
18. If the examiners have any queries about Queen Mary's requirements for the award of the research degree, or about the Academic Regulations, they should contact the [RDO](#).
19. All matters relating to the examination are confidential, and examiners should not contact any third party, other than the supervisor. Otherwise, please direct all queries to the [RDO](#).
20. The educational needs provisions of the Equality Act 2010 require institutions to make reasonable adjustments for candidates with physical and special learning difficulties in their assessment. Candidates must inform the [RDO](#) at the time of examination entry (or as soon as possible afterwards) if they require any special arrangements to be made. The RDO will inform the adjustments to the examiners before the viva takes place. If examiners are informed directly by the supervisor, or the candidate, of any disability adjustments, the examiner must seek advice from the [RDO](#).

Purpose and conduct of the oral examination

21. The Academic Regulations specify that the examination process is held in private and is not a public examination. All matters related to the examination are confidential. Examiners are not permitted to divulge the content of previously unpublished material contained in the student's thesis until such time as the thesis is made publicly available, or any restrictions on access to the thesis are removed. The viva may not be recorded.

Guidance Notes on Research Degree Examinations

Last updated 16 October 2025

22. The purpose of the oral examination is to examine the candidate's thesis and relevant subjects. During the oral, the examiners should seek to establish whether all the requirements for a thesis submitted for the relevant degree have been met (as laid out in the current [Academic Regulations](#), section 8, *Appendix 1: Degree requirements ResM, MPhil, PhD, MD(Res), EngD, DrPS, DPsych, DClin, and DClinDent*), and to establish that the thesis is genuinely the work of the candidate. If there is any doubt that the thesis is the candidate's own work, the examiners should contact the [RDO](#).
23. The examiners are advised to discuss between themselves the strategy they propose to adopt during the examination and to outline this to the candidate, at its outset.
24. There are no set requirements about the conduct of oral examinations, nor about their duration, but they should be conducted in such a way that the candidate has adequate opportunity, encouragement and time to explain their research and to defend the thesis. It is recommended that examiners should allow short breaks at appropriate points during a long oral examination.
25. The supervisor, if present, does not have the right to participate in the examination but may contribute if invited to do so by the examiners. The supervisor must be absent when the decision regarding the outcome of the examination is to be made. No person other than the examiners, the independent chair (if appointed), one supervisor, and the candidate may attend the oral examination.
26. If the candidate becomes unwell or distressed during the oral examination, as to being unable to proceed, the examiners should, after such consultation with the candidate, and the supervisor (if possible, at that time), decide whether to continue the oral examination.
 - a) If the examination continues, the examiners should note in their final report that the candidate decided to continue with the examination, despite being unwell.
 - b) If the examiners decide not to continue, they should determine whether there is sufficient evidence, and if it will be necessary to hold the oral examination on another occasion.
27. If the candidate makes comments to the examiners, which put them under moral pressure (e.g., alluding to the consequences of failure), or offers any kind of incentive to the examiners to influence on a favorable outcome, the examination should be terminated, and a report made to the Director of Registry Services, via the [RDO](#).
28. In addition to examining the candidate orally, the examiners have the discretion to examine the candidate by means of written papers or practical examinations. This provision is rarely invoked, and examiners are asked to contact the [RDO](#), if they wish to do so.

The outcome of the examination

29. At the conclusion of the oral examination, the candidate and the supervisor (if present) should withdraw from the room, and the examiners should confer on the result in private.
30. The examiners have discretion, after the initial private discussion, to consult the supervisor (irrespective of whether they were present at the oral) and/or the [RDO](#), particularly if they have doubts relating to the appropriate decision to be made. The examiner must declare this in their post-viva joint report.
31. The options open to the examiners, in determining the results, are set out in detail in the [Academic Regulations](#), section 8, **Decisions of the Panel of Examiners**). In summary these are:

Guidance Notes on Research Degree Examinations

Last updated 16 October 2025

- i. Pass;
- ii. Pass subject to minor amendments to be completed and checked by one of the examiners within six months;
- iii. Pass subject to major amendments to be completed and checked by both examiners within nine months;
- iv. Not pass, but the candidate is allowed to revise the thesis and resubmit it within 18 months (for the PhD, EngD and MD(Res) degrees) or 12 months (for the MPhil degree);
- v. Not pass, but the candidate is allowed to take a written paper or practical examination;
- vi. Not pass, but the candidate is allowed to submit to a second oral examination on the same thesis and by the same examiners within 18 months;
- vii. [If entered for a PhD] Fail PhD but the candidate is deemed to have met the requirements for an MPhil (with or without minor amendments) or should be allowed to resubmit a revised thesis for the MPhil degree within 12 months;
- viii. Fail outright: no re-entry permitted.

Reporting on the decision

32. Examiners are required to report the Outcome of Examination via the [MySIS](#) Examiner Portal indicating which of the available decisions they have made, and they should write a joint report, giving the grounds on which their decision is based. The joint report should include the following points and additional requirements in paragraphs 28 to 37 below:
- a. Name of the candidate;
 - b. Thesis title;
 - c. (if applicable) a statement summarising the discussion with the candidate of how their work was affected by Covid19;
 - d. a commentary on the matters discussed with the candidate;
 - e. clear description of any revisions required to the thesis (this may be provided as an annex or annotations to the thesis);
 - f. confirmation of whether the viva was held face-to-face or online or mixed mode of attendance;
 - g. if the viva was held online, comment on the quality and consistency of the online connection and note any breaks in connection;
 - h. a summary note, if it was necessary to consult the supervisor and/or the [RDO](#) about the appropriate decision to be made;
- and at the end of the report:
- i. Signatures of each of the examiners; and
 - j. Date
33. The report should have regard to the requirements of a thesis for the relevant research degree. It should not cross-refer to the examiners' preliminary reports unless the examiners wish the candidate to receive a copy of those preliminary reports. The candidate may see the examiners' preliminary reports, in the event of their appealing against the examiners' decision, or if the candidate were to make a data subject access request.
34. If the examiners decide to refer the candidate to revise and resubmit the thesis for the degree, they should indicate in what ways the current thesis fails to satisfy the requirements for the degree. and they should clearly indicate their recommendations for the correction of the thesis.
35. Examiners who are referring a candidate to revise and resubmit the thesis (18 months for the PhD or 12 months for the MPhil) should indicate on the [MySIS](#) Outcome of Examination, and in their joint report, if
- a) it will definitely not be necessary to conduct an oral on the revised thesis;
 - b) they will definitely require an oral on the revised thesis;
 - c) they want to reserve their position until they have read the revised thesis.
36. If the examiners decide that the criteria for the PhD degree have not been met, but the criteria for the MPhil have been, or might be, satisfied they should:
- a. explain the basis for their decision not to allow resubmission for the PhD; and
 - b. show how the requirements for a thesis for the MPhil are satisfied.
37. The MPhil degree is an award in its own right, and it may not be awarded unless the criteria for that degree are satisfied. It is not to be awarded as compensation for a failed PhD. The criteria for MPhil and PhD are outlined in the Queen Mary [Academic Regulations](#), section 8, **Appendix 1: Degree requirements ResM, MPhil, PhD, MD(Res), EngD, DrPS, DPsych, DClin, and DClinDent.**

38. If the examiners decide to fail the candidate outright, they should indicate the basis for their decision to reject all the other options.
39. The examiners should agree, between themselves, at the end of the oral examination, the arrangements for drafting and finalising their joint report, and for completing the examination outcome requirements on the [MySIS](#) Examiner Portal, including uploading their preliminary reports and the joint report. Examiners must delete electronic copies of the thesis and return hard copies of the thesis (if provided) to the [RDO](#).
40. The examination outcome must be completed and submitted on the [MySIS](#) Examiner Portal, within two weeks of the examination. If, for any reason, the examiners cannot report the outcome, within two weeks of the oral examination, one of the examiners should contact the [RDO](#) to report the delay, and to inform a timescale for the report to be submitted.
41. If the examiners have indicated in the Outcome of Examination that they require the candidate to make minor or major amendments, they must inform the [RDO](#) when the amendments have been completed to their satisfaction. The student will send the amended thesis directly to the examiners. Please certify completion of amendments through the [MySIS](#) Examiner Portal.
42. Examiners have the right to make comments in confidence, in a separate report to the Principal, via principal@qmul.ac.uk

Notification to the candidate

43. If the examiners wish to advise the candidate, orally and informally, of their decision, at the conclusion of their deliberations, following the examination, they must make clear to the candidate that the result is not formal and final until confirmed and notified by Queen Mary to the candidate.
44. The Research Degrees Office can only release the Outcome of Examination decision and the examiners' joint report, to the candidate, the supervisor, and the school/department officer, after both examiners have completed and signed off their MySIS Exam Outcome tasks. The candidate, the supervisor and their department will only receive the preliminary reports if the examiners have given their permission on MySIS. The candidate may see the examiners' preliminary reports in the event of their appeal against the examiners' decision, or if the candidate were to make a data subject access request.

Conferment of award

45. Research degrees are formally awarded on the last day of each month. The award of the degree is confirmed on behalf of Senate, by the Research Degrees Programmes and Examinations Board. Following the conference of the award, the Research Degrees Office will formally notify the candidate. The degree certificate will be dispatched separately, within three months of the award date.

Examination of re-entry candidates

46. Unless it is impossible for them to do so, it is expected that the original examiners will examine the candidate on re-entry.
47. In examining a re-entry candidate, the examiners should have regard to the report they made on the first examination, copies of which can be made available to them.
48. Examiners have discretion on whether to hold an oral examination, on a revised and resubmitted thesis, but they will need to have regard to any statement they have made about this, in their joint report on the original examination.
49. When the revised thesis is emailed to the examiners, the Research Degrees Office will ask them to confirm whether a further oral examination is required. If so, the Research Degrees Office will inform the supervisor, who will make the necessary arrangements.
50. When the re-examination takes place, the regulations and procedures in force at the time of re-entry apply, apart from the possibility of not holding an oral examination.

If the examiners are not in agreement or require further assistance

51. The examiners may request the appointment of a third examiner, at any time, if they consider it desirable; it should always be done before they report that they are unable to arrive at an agreement. In these circumstances, they should contact the [RDO](#) for advice in the first instance.

Examiners' fees and expenses

52. External examiners may claim reasonable travel and other expenses. Claims should be submitted to the [RDO](#) using the Queen Mary [expenses claim form](#) at the end of the examination, and within 3 months of the date of expenditure. Claims may be submitted earlier, where advance payment for tickets has been necessary. Information about the maximum rates for travel and expenses claims that will be reimbursed is provided in the Queen Mary [Travel and Expenses Policy & Procedures](#).

Please refer to:

- Section 3 about travel expenses. Travel is expected to be at standard rates. Please read the guidance for exceptions. For travel in London using an Oyster Card, if the card is registered with Transport for London an e-receipt for travel can be obtained or a statement can be printed from the Transport for London website (if the card is registered with TfL).
- Section 4 about accommodation expenses. Accommodation is expected to be of UK 3-star standard. Please read the guidance for exceptions, especially para. 4.8. For example where it can be evidenced that a 4 star hotel is able to be booked at a cheaper rate than 3 star hotel options, or where there are other relevant costs to factor in to assess the cumulative cost of a trip, e.g. meals or travel costs.
- Section 5 about subsistence expenses.
Subsistence costs cover breakfast, lunch and dinner. These may be claimed on the following limits: up to £12 if the absence away from the usual workplace is over 6 hours but less than 9 hours; up to £48 if the

Guidance Notes on Research Degree Examinations

Last updated 16 October 2025

absence away from the usual workplace is over 9 hours. There is a maximum of £30 for an evening meal. Please read the guidance for further details. Claims for teas, coffees and light refreshments that do not accompany breakfast, lunch or dinner are not permissible.

Please discuss exceptions with the viva convenor. Exceptions require the prior written approval of the budget holder. The budget holder is the school/institute in which the student and their supervisor are based.

Claims must be submitted within 3 months of the purchase of the travel/activity, unless there are exceptional circumstances for the delay. It is a HMRC requirement for receipts to be retained. If you pay by contactless card methods, please request a tax receipt. All receipts should accompany the expense claim: either scanned, uploaded and attached to online expense claims (i.e. sent by email) or if submitted on paper attached to the claim. Missing receipts will delay payment of expenses and will not be reimbursed.

53. The examination fee (£200) is approved for payment, after examiners have submitted their preliminary and joint reports (via [MySIS](#)); and external examiners also need to provide all necessary payment documents (the completed [HR personal details form](#) and passport photo/information page).

- a. The RDO emails all those details to examiners, with the thesis weblink, at the time the examiners accept the invitation to conduct the examination;
- b. Payments are made at the end of each month, through the Queen Mary payroll process. Payment requests, reviewed and approved before the last working day of a month, are paid at the end of the following month. Consequently, payment of the fee can take up to three months.

54. The Queen Mary HR Office requires that, to demonstrate their eligibility to work in the European Union, all examiners must provide a copy of the picture page of their passport along with a copy of any work permit (for those requiring a permit).

Payments cannot be made without a copy of the passport photo/information page.

Please send payment documents and scanned copies of receipts with the expenses claim form to the [RDO](#).

Proof of eligibility to work in the UK

55. The guidance on the Right to Work check and visa requirements depends on whether the oral viva examination is held online or is held face-to-face in the UK on one of Queen Mary's campuses. Individuals working in the UK require a Right to Work check.

56. To comply with Right to Work checks required by the UK Home Office, all examiners are asked to provide a scanned copy of their passport photo/information page, including those who are British or Irish citizens. This information must be provided before the examination, even if you have worked for Queen Mary before. All external examiners must provide a verified ID for payroll purposes to process the examiner's fee.

a. Online viva examinations

Proof of eligibility to work in the UK is not required for an international examiner, if the examiner attends the viva whilst resident outside the UK. As noted above, a scanned copy of each examiner's passport photo/information page is required, including for those examiners who are British or Irish citizens. International examiners must provide a verified ID for payroll purposes.

b. Face to face viva examinations in the UK

Proof of eligibility to work in the UK is required, if the viva is held face-to-face in the UK, for non-British / Irish citizens entering the UK to attend the viva.

57. If you have EU Settled Status you can prove the right to work using the Home Office online service ‘prove your right to work to an employer’ available on GOV.UK: <https://www.gov.uk/prove-right-to-work>. Please send the share code and your date of birth, which will enable us to conduct the right to work check using the online service at GOV.UK: <https://www.gov.uk/view-right-to-work>
58. If you live and work outside the UK, you may be able to enter the UK through the [Permitted Paid Engagement visa](#) route. This route will allow you to enter the UK to work for a maximum period of 1 month.
59. If you are a “visa national” the visa costs £95 and must be applied in advance of travel. If you are entering the UK via this route, you must send [RDO](#) a scanned copy of the visa before you travel to the UK.
60. If you are a “non-visa national” you will be able to travel to the UK without a visa, but it is essential that you speak with a UK border agent on arrival to advise them that you are entering under the Permitted Paid Engagement visa route. You will receive a wet ink stamp on your passport - do not enter via the e-gates. There is no fee for this. Please bring your invitation from Queen Mary to act as an examiner, to show at the border check. If you will be entering the UK via this route, you must send [RDO](#) a scanned copy of the stamp in your passport after arrival in the UK.

Information about the Permitted Paid Engagement visa is at
<https://www.gov.uk/permitted-paid-engagement-visa/overview>

The visa national list can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/immigration-rules/immigration-rules-appendix-visitor-visa-national-list>

61. For more information, please see <http://hr.qmul.ac.uk/workqm/righttowork/workinguk>

Equal opportunities

62. All examinations are subject to the Queen Mary Equal Opportunities Policy, copies of which are available from the Research Degrees Office. All candidates are subject to the same academic criteria and requirements.

Appeals procedure

63. The Queen Mary Appeal Regulations provide the appeal mechanism for research degree examinations
<https://www.qmul.ac.uk/governance-and-legal-services/student-appeals/appeals/>

Queries on this guide can be addressed to the [Research Degrees Office](#).

Research Degrees Office
Queen Mary University of London
Graduate Centre, room 213
Mile End Road, London, E1 4NS
tel: +44 (0)20 7882 7474
web: <https://www.qmul.ac.uk/registry-services/research-degrees/>

Annexe A

Research Degrees Programmes and Examination Board

Guidance to examiners on taking account of the disruption caused by Covid-19 in examining a thesis

1. Covid-19 has impacted research students' work in a wide variety of ways since early 2020. Students submitting their theses during periods of library and/or laboratory closure, for example, may have been unable to complete all of their references. Students at an earlier stage of their research, on the other hand, may have had to revise the scope and methods of their project.
2. It is appropriate to take these circumstances into account when examining a thesis. This is in line with a principle articulated for PhD theses in Queen Mary's [Academic Regulations](#), **Appendix 1: Degree requirements ResM, MPhil, PhD, MD(Res), EngD, DrPS, DPsych, DClín, and DClínDent** – '*The scope of the thesis shall be what might reasonably be expected after three or at most four years of full-time study*'.
3. What can reasonably be expected of a thesis submitted by a student whose work was disrupted by Covid-19, *whether the student was granted additional time to complete their thesis because of that disruption*, is not the same as what can be expected of a thesis completed in different circumstances.
4. There is no expectation that the standard of work done by students should have been compromised by studying through the Covid-19 crisis, rather that the volume of work, referencing, etc. may have been affected.
5. For this reason, we would ask examiners to consider the disruption experienced by students when making their decisions. In some cases, students may include a brief statement in their thesis to explain the impact of their disruption (e.g. a footnote in their introduction and/or conclusion to explain missing references, further fieldwork or experiments that would have been carried out if circumstances permitted, etc.). However, such statements may not always be present. Examiners must therefore ask a student, during their oral examination, to summarise briefly how their work was affected by Covid-19. The Outcome of Research Degree Examination report requires examiners to confirm that this matter was discussed. Examiners will also be prompted to include a statement in the joint report that they produce after the oral examination.
6. This policy will apply to all Queen Mary postgraduate research students until further notice. We anticipate that it will continue at least until all students who enrolled before March 2020 – when UK universities and other research facilities began a period of closure, and when research travel was not possible – submit their theses. It will be reviewed annually.
7. Please contact the [Research Degrees Office](#) with any queries.

For further information please see the [information for examiners of research degrees](#) webpage.

Annexe B

Nomination and appointment of examiners and eligibility to examine

Nomination and appointment of examiners

1. Examiners are nominated via MySIS, by a candidate's supervisor, and the nominations are approved within the School/Institute, by the Director of Graduate Studies, or other senior member of staff, in their absence (such as the Director of Research or Head of School/Institute). The final decision on the appointment of the examiners is approved by the Research Degrees Programmes and Examinations Board (RDPEB), on behalf of Senate. A brief justification for the choice of examiners is required to aid the RDPEB in its decision making.

2. There are two models for the Panel of Examiners. The Panel normally comprises two examiners as follows:

Model A

- one internal examiner from the academic staff of Queen Mary University of London who has not been involved in the candidate's work and has not been a member of the candidate's progression panel(s); and
- one external examiner.

Or

Model B

- Where the criteria above for an internal examiner cannot be met or a school/institute considers it to be academically desirable, two external examiners may be appointed.

3. A statement in support of the nomination of two external examiners, giving the reasons why an internal examiner meeting the normal criteria was not nominated, should be included on the MySIS nomination form.

4. When appointing an internal examiner, it is necessary to confirm that the internal examiner is genuinely independent of the candidate's research studies.

5. In the case that the candidate is a member of the academic staff of Queen Mary, an examiner internal to Queen Mary may not be appointed.

6. RDPEB may recommend the appointment of a third examiner, or independent chair, when considering the approval of the nominated examiners, for example if the examiners' combined experience of conducting research degree examinations does not meet the minimum requirements in the Academic Regulations and there is a limited field of experts in the field of study.

- a. The independent chair must be a senior member of academic staff (Senior Lecturer, Reader or Professor) with experience of examining at least one UK PhD (or equivalent for other awards). They may be from the same School or Institute as the candidate but should not have had any prior involvement with the project or with the student. They should also be from a different area in the School/Institute and not from the same research group / sub-department or unit / centre. In departments where there are no 'research team / unit' distinctions below departmental level, the chair may be from that department as long as they have not given the student any research input or advice, for example in English and Drama. In such cases, the responsibility of the chair is to manage the process and ensure adherence to the regulations. The independent chair is not an examiner; they

Guidance Notes on Research Degree Examinations

Last updated 16 October 2025

provide guidance on the examination process and regulations. They do not contribute to the decision regarding whether the standards for award have been met.

7. Questions about any decisions of RDPEB, relating to the nomination of examiners, should be sent to the Research Degrees Office, to be raised with the Chair of the Board. Appeals against any decisions of RDPEB relating to the nomination of examiners may be made in writing within two weeks of notification of the decision to the Vice Principal for Research. Appeals can only be made on the basis that the rules have not been applied correctly, or that exceptional circumstances have not been fully considered. The decision on any such appeal is final.

Eligibility to Examine

8. Examiners should be experts in the field of the thesis, but not necessarily in all parts of the precise topic. The aim should be to appoint two examiners who, between them, cover all aspects of the work to be presented by the candidate.
9. The examiners should have examined at least five research degrees of the same or equivalent level between them, of which a minimum of three examinations should have been for a research degree in the UK. For the MD(Res), at least one examiner should have previous experience of examining for the MD(Res). If this is not possible, an independent chair may be appointed to oversee the oral examination.
10. Neither examiner should have had any significant and recent research or other contact with the candidate or supervisor that might compromise the examination. They must not have taken an active role in considering the student's progression and/or transfer of status from MPhil to PhD. Supervisors are required to indicate any connections between themselves/the candidate and the nominated examiners, including joint publication(s) and joint grant-holding, on the MySIS examiner's nominations form. Examiners (internal and external) should not attend any pre-viva seminars presented by the candidate or practice vivas for the candidate once they have been nominated to examine.
11. Supervisors should avoid repeatedly nominating the same person as an examiner. An external examiner should not normally be appointed more than once during an academic year by members of the same School/Institute. An internal examiner should not normally be appointed more than three times during an academic year. Any case for exemption from these recommendations should be made on the nomination form.
12. NHS Consultants or the equivalent in the NHS who are not Queen Mary or University employees may be appointed as examiners, but they should hold an Honorary Senior Lecturer or above contract with a College or University. Other professional experts may be appointed as external examiners, but the normal requirements for examining experience across the examination team will apply.
13. Individuals who were previously members of staff, students or other members of Queen Mary must not be appointed as an external examiner until a period of three years has elapsed.
14. Individuals who have retired from academic positions at Queen Mary, or another higher education institution, may be appointed as examiners, in accordance with the guidance, if they remain active in their field of research.
15. Overseas examiners may be appointed, as external examiners, where it is considered that such an appointment is necessary and appropriate. The supervisors should provide a statement indicating the reasons for the nomination of an examiner from overseas, and confirmation that the School/Institute will pay for the travelling and other expenses of the examiner. Please note the important information, in the guidance notes, about eligibility to work in the UK and UK Home Office requirements.