



Guidance for Supervisors: Appointment of MPhil/PhD Examiners

The Research Student Sub-Committee (RSSC) is responsible for formally considering the nomination of MPhil and PhD examiners for Birkbeck Research Degrees. The aim of the procedure is to appoint examiners who will be able to make a fair and independent assessment of the candidate's thesis and to ensure appropriate and consistent standards for PhDs awarded. Examiners must be formally appointed and have agreed to act well before the candidate submits their thesis. This ensures that the examination process can start promptly on submission of the thesis to the Birkbeck Graduate Research School (BGRS).

Number of examiners

The supervisor is asked to nominate two examiners, of whom:

- At least one must be external to the University of London.
- One will normally be from a college of the University of London.

Both examiners shall be experts in the field of the thesis but not necessarily in all parts of the precise topic. Many theses are interdisciplinary, and the aim should be to appoint a team of examiners who, between them, cover all aspects of the work to be presented by the candidate. It may sometimes be necessary to appoint three examiners to achieve this, and in that case the supervisor should nominate three examiners to act jointly. In exceptional cases RSSC may consider two external examiners.

Principles guiding the selection of examiners

The examiners appointed shall have had no direct involvement in the candidate's research or close connections with either the candidate or supervisor which might inhibit a completely objective examination. It is accepted that examiners will usually be acquainted with the supervisor, and sometimes the candidate, and this in itself is not a bar to acting as an examiner. At least one examiner must have UK examining experience and shall normally have had experience of examining for a research degree of the University of London. *In some circumstances it may be appropriate for the viva to be chaired by an independent member of academic staff. The role of an Independent Chair is to attend the oral examination and ensure that it is conducted fairly and in accordance with the University Regulations. A procedure and guidance for independent chairs is [available here](#).*

Supervisors are encouraged to draw their nominated internal examiners from the wider University of London community, but may also nominate an internal examiner from Birkbeck. In the latter case it is necessary to demonstrate (as do universities generally within the UK) that the internal examiner is genuinely independent of the student's course of study, and that no better alternative candidate exists either internal or external to the University.

It is difficult to make precise rules to cover all eventualities, as the circumstances of individuals and their relationship with others can vary considerably, but generally the guidance under 'Ineligible examiners' below should be observed.

Ineligible examiners

- Academic staff who have taken an active role in considering a candidate's transfer of registration from the MPhil to the PhD degree are ineligible to serve as internal examiners. Staff members who may have attended seminars / presentations given by the candidate may be nominated as internal examiners provided they have taken no part in the transfer decision.
- Former members of the academic staff of the University of London who resigned rather than retired are not normally eligible to serve as external examiners until the expiry of three years from their departure from the University. Retired teachers, who are still active in their fields, often retain close links with their former departments and may be appointed as internal examiners. It is necessary to guard against an individual being appointed as an internal examiner one week and an external the next, which would imply that there is no distinction between the two.
- Supervisors are asked to avoid repeatedly nominating the same person as an examiner, either as an internal or external, or nominating each other to act for the other's student within a short time framework.

If you have any queries about a particular person's eligibility to act, please consult the Birkbeck Graduate Research School (graduateresearchschool@bbk.ac.uk)

Visiting professors

A visiting professor at a College of the University but in a different department or research group to the candidate may be nominated as an internal examiner, provided there is no connection between him/her and the candidate. Sometimes it may be appropriate for a professor / lecturer from another university visiting at one College to be an external examiner for a candidate at another.

Examiner nomination form

Supervisors must complete an electronic copy of the 'Nomination of Examiners' form' available on the [BGRS website](#) and send it to graduateresearchschool@bbk.ac.uk. It is strongly recommended that the form should be submitted at least four months before the anticipated thesis submission date. Supervisors should approach potential examiners about whether they would be willing to act before submitting the nomination form.

Consideration/ approval by RSSC

Nominated examiners will be considered by RSSC in accordance with the Appointment of Examiners for Research Degrees and once approved the BGRS will inform the supervisor of the outcome.

Formal acceptance by examiners

Once RSSC has approved the examiners, they will be officially invited to act by the BGRS. The approved examiners must formally respond to the BGRS confirming they are willing to act by email to graduateresearchschool@bbk.ac.uk. The candidate's thesis cannot be sent to examiners until the BGRS receives this confirmation.