



Policy for the Appointment of Independent Chairs for Research Degree Vivas

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Policy for the Appointment of Independent Chairs for Research Degree Vivas

This policy outlines the University of Essex approach to the Appointment of Independent Chairs and their role within the viva process. Partner Institutions are to have their own policy for the appointment of Independent Chairs that, at a minimum, meets the requirements in this policy.

1. Pool of Independent Chairs

- 1.1. Each department is asked to nominate at least two members of staff to be listed as a potential Independent Chair on an annual basis. Departments will be required to put forward additional members of staff depending on the size of their postgraduate research student community. All departments are able to nominate Independent Chairs to be approved by the Faculty Education Committee, including those without PGR students if they wish. Departments will be notified of the number they must put forward by the Postgraduate Research Education Team and this will be as follows:

Number of PGR students	Number of nominations required
1-99	2
100-149	3
150+	4

- 1.2. The Faculty Education Committees approves the list of potential Independent Chairs annually.

2. Criteria for an Independent Chair

- 2.1. To be nominated as an Independent Chair, the member of staff must:
- be a permanent member of staff who has been an Internal Examiner for at least two postgraduate research examinations at Essex; or, examined two theses externally and undertaken University of Essex Independent Chair training (when available); and

- have a good understanding of the University's procedures and regulations for the award being examined.

3. Appointment of an Independent Chair

3.1. The Faculty Dean Postgraduate will appoint an Independent Chair when:

- the Internal Examiner has no experience in research degree examining
- the Internal Examiner is new to research degree examining at Essex, and has not undertaken University of Essex Internal Examiner training (when available)
- the viva is following a referral and resubmission of a thesis
- the viva is following an appeal
- there are circumstances affecting the candidate that make it desirable to have an Independent Chair at the viva
- the candidate is a member of staff of the University or a Partner Institution and being examined as a staff candidate; or
- where agreed in individual cases to be necessary

3.2. In each case, the Independent Chair chosen will be from outside the candidate's department and will have no conflict of interest with the candidate, the supervisor or the External Examiner.

3.3. An allocation of four hours, per viva, will be recorded as part of the Independent Chair's workload allocation, as and when they fulfil the role.

4. Role of the Independent Chair

4.1. The Independent Chair is not an examiner. Their role is to facilitate the examination process and procedures, as follows:

- the Independent Chair is not expected to make the arrangements for the viva, but should liaise with the Graduate Administrator from the candidate's department who is responsible for such arrangements
- to inform the examiners as necessary of the University's procedures
- to ensure that the examination is conducted in accordance with the University's procedures
- where necessary, to help mediate between the examiners to identify possible recommendations and facilitate an agreed outcome

- To ensure that the conduct of the viva provides the candidate with an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and to explain/defend their work.

5. Responsibilities of the Independent Chair

- To attend the pre-viva meeting to advise the examiners on any procedural matters and to help agree the approach to the viva.
- The Independent Chair does not read the thesis in advance of the viva (but has access to a copy for the viva).
- At the beginning of the viva, to introduce the examiners and to explain the format of the viva to the candidate.
- The Independent Chair does not participate in the questioning of the candidate on the content of the thesis.
- During the viva, to recommend an adjournment for a break if the examination exceeds two hours, or earlier if necessary.
- Exceptionally, the Independent Chair may adjourn/suspend the viva where they have concerns about its conduct.
- When the candidate has left the room/call for the outcome to be determined by the examiners, the Independent Chair shall advise the examiners on any procedural matters (e.g. outcomes available to them) as necessary.
- The Independent Chair shall play no role in the academic assessment.
- Where the examiners are unable to agree on the outcome, the Independent Chair shall advise the candidate.
- At the end of the viva, the Independent Chair shall ensure that arrangements are in place for completion of the Joint Report Form (and any accompanying paperwork).
- The Joint Report will include a place to record that the viva was conducted with an Independent Chair present and that they are satisfied with the conduct of the viva. The Independent Chair should then sign the Joint Report form themselves and return all examination paperwork to the Postgraduate Research Education Team.

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