**Annex K: External and Internal Examiners**

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# 1.  Introduction

No University qualification shall be awarded without participation in the examining process by at least one External Examiner. External Examiners are responsible to the Senate which authorises the award of qualifications.

# 2.  Number of Examiners Required For a Thesis

The examination of theses should be by two or more examiners of whom at least one shall be an External Examiner. It may, on occasions, be appropriate to appoint two External Examiners (and no Internal Examiner) or two External Examiners and one Internal Examiner. Where this is the case, the reasons for this should be provided in an addendum to the appointment form. In cases where the candidate is also a member of staff employed in a substantive role, they shall be examined by at least three examiners, of whom two must be External and one Internal[[1]](#footnote-1).

# 3.  Appointment of Examiners

Recommendations for the appointment of examiners should be submitted on the appropriate [form](https://www.kent.ac.uk/education/regulatory-framework/codes-of-practice-for-research-courses#annexk) along with a copy of the proposed External Examiner(s)’s CV. Initial right to work checks on the proposed External Examiner should be carried out by the Division at this stage. Once the form has been completed and signed by the Divisional Director of Graduate Studies and PG Student Experience it should be sent to the Quality Assurance and Compliance Office for scrutiny prior to approval by the Dean of the Graduate and Researcher College on behalf of Senate and Council.

# 4.  Considering Recommendations for Appointment of External Examiners

In considering recommendations for the appointment of External Examiners, the following will be taken into account:

4.1 Only persons of appropriate seniority and/or experience in the fields covered by the course of study (or parts thereof) who are able to command authority should be appointed.

4.2 Where the proposed External is not a senior academic, a note explaining the reasons for the proposal should be made on the recommendation form. The Dean of the Graduate and Researcher College will not approve such a recommendation where the explanatory note simply relates to the excellence of the proposed External Examiner (this is to be expected as a matter of course). The note should also indicate:

* The number of people in suitable seniority for appointment as External Examiner (in some cases this may, of course, be none in this country).
* If there are individuals of appropriate seniority who could be appointed, the reason(s) why such individuals were not being put forward for appointment should be given (this might be because such individuals had refused to accept appointment or were not available (e.g. illness or study leave away from the UK).

4.3 Individuals should not be invited to become External Examiners if they have been employed by the University during the period of the student’s registration.

4.4 In respect of PhDs, the proposed External Examiner should be for a single candidate only at any one time, within the same School. If the nominated External Examiner has been appointed to a candidate in the same School within the current candidate’s registration, this must be declared in the appointment form.

4.5 In respect of Master’s by Research, the proposed External Examiner may be appointed to a number of students where the theses are in a similar area/sub-area of research. The School/Division should limit the number of students that may be appointed to an External Examiner at any one time. For example, the School/Division might limit a single External Examiner to be appointed to no more than ten Master’s by Research students, thus requiring additional External Examiners where the cohort is greater than ten. To reduce the risk of examiner bias, Schools should where possible avoid allocating the same pairings of Internal and External examiners regularly to candidates.

4.6 The Division must be satisfied that the nominee can demonstrate familiarity with the standard to be expected of students in order to achieve the award to be assessed**.**

4.7 The nominee must meet any applicable criteria set by relevant professional, statutory or regulatory bodies.

4.8 Occasionally individuals from outside higher education are proposed as External Examiners. This may be appropriate given the content of the thesis and/or the non-availability of a suitable person from higher education to act as an External Examiner. In all cases the information specified in sections 3 and 4 above should be included with the appointment form together with an explanation of why the particular person had been put forward.

4.8.1 Where the proposed External has a civil service post/grading, their post details should include their grade. Grade 7 (Principal Scientific Officer) is at senior lecturer/reader level and grade 6 (Senior Principal Scientific Officer) is at reader/professor level.

4.9 While most appointments as External Examiners are of individuals based in the UK the University’s procedures for the appointment of External Examiners do permit appointments from other European countries or other countries outside of Europe. Appointments from outside Europe may be approved where this is the most appropriate given the content of the thesis and the non-availability of a suitable person from within Europe. The rationale for such appointment must be provided with the form.

1. The normal expectation is that the oral examination for a research degree will take place at the University at Kent. An oral examination will only be conducted elsewhere or by video link in exceptional circumstances when the candidate or External Examiner is at a distance from the University and unable to travel to the University at the appropriate time.
2. Any External Examiners so appointed must understand the requirements of a UK research degree and be familiar with UK examination processes. In such circumstances the recommendation should be accompanied by a note explaining the reasons. (Note: The University’s PhD regulations provide for an oral examination “unless specifically exempted from this requirement by the Board of the Division concerned”. This is, and should be, very unusual.)

4.10 Where there is one or more of the following conflicts of interest, a person may not be appointed as an External Examiner:

i. They are a member of a governing body or committee of University of Kent or one of its collaborative partners, or are a current employee of Kent or one of its collaborative partners. (Note that an individual would not be excluded from becoming an External Examiner of a University of Kent research degree where they are or have been an External Examiner for a taught course of study awarded by the University of Kent;

ii. They have a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with the supervisor, student or Internal Examiner;

iii. They are a former Kent staff member or student, unless a period of three years has elapsed and all students taught by or with the nominee have completed their course(s).

# 5.  Selecting Appropriate Internal Examiner

When selecting an appropriate Internal Examiner, the Division should ensure that:

i. The Internal Examiner has evidence of research activity in the past five years;

ii. The Internal Examiner should normally have experience of supervising candidates as a supervisory chair, main supervisor or as part of a supervisory team;

iii. The Internal Examiner should have familiarity with the broad subject area of the thesis and be an existing member of University staff. In cases where honorary members of staff are proposed as Internal Examiners, a special case for the appointment must be made.

# 6.  Considering Appointment of Appropriate Internal and External Examiners

In considering the appointment of appropriate Internal and External Examiners, Divisions should note that:

6.1 no member of the student's supervisory team (or any academic staff member who has been involved with supervising the research project or their progress reviews in the final six months before submission of the thesis) should be appointed as an examiner;

6.2 it would be exceptional to appoint as Internal (or External Examiner) researchers who have had a substantial direct involvement in the student's work or whose own work is the focus of the research project.

6.3 Internal Examiners should not have a professional or personal relationship with the student, the proposed External Examiner or the supervisor(s).

# 7.  Parity of Examiners

When considering the selection of an Internal and External Examiner, Divisions should ensure that there is appropriate seniority, experience and expertise between the two examiners.

# 8.  Submission of Thesis

A research student is required to give the University two months’ notice of an intention to submit a thesis for examination. Ordinarily this should allow sufficient time for the appointment of examiners to be completed although, of course, occasionally this is not the case. However, in **no** circumstances should a prospective examiner be given a copy of the thesis to be examined prior to their appointment being approved by the Dean of the Graduate and Researcher College. Similarly, in **no** circumstances should a viva examination of a candidate be held prior to the approval of the examiners by the Dean of the Graduate and Researcher College.

# 9.  Role of Quality Assurance and Compliance Office

9.1 The time taken to complete the scrutiny and approval processes outlined above can be minimised by following the advice outlined above and, in case of doubt, seeking advice from the Quality Assurance and Compliance Office.

9.2 The Quality Assurance and Compliance Office will scrutinise examiners’ appointment forms before passing them to the Dean of the Graduate and Researcher College for approval (as per [section 3](https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/codes/research/annexl.html#recommendation) above). Forms will be dealt with promptly, however, any inaccuracies will inevitably cause delay. It is, therefore, in the interests of all concerned to ensure that forms reaching the Graduate and Researcher College are correct and complete.

# 10.  Divisional PG Office

After approval, examiners’ forms are returned to the appropriate Division. The Divisional PG Office should then take appropriate action which will include:

* Copying the form to the student’s supervisor and the Internal Examiner(s) (so that they know that the proposed examiners have been approved).
* Writing to the External Examiner to confirm their appointment.
* Letting the examiners have copies of the thesis and examiners’ report forms.

# 11.  If Graduate and Researcher College Unable to Approve Recommendation for Examiners

Where the Dean of the Graduate and Researcher College is unable to approve the recommendation for examiners, the form will be returned to the Divisional PG Office.

# 12.  Maximum Timescale for Completion

By accepting the appointment, Examiners agree on a maximum timescale of three months (upon the receipt of the thesis) for completion of the examination including the oral examination.

# 13. If Appointed Examiner No Longer Able to Examine Student

 Where a student has been referred and one or more of the appointed examiners is no longer able to examine the student (for reasons such as leaving the university, relocation or death), the Division will nominate an appropriate examiner for the consideration of the Dean of the Graduate and Researcher College to take over the examination process. The nomination should be sent to the Quality Assurance and Compliance Office prior to consideration by the Dean of the Graduate and Researcher College.

# 14. Termination of Appointment

 The University reserves the right to terminate the appointment of an External Examiner without notice where the Vice-Chancellor considers that the Examiner has not properly undertaken their duties.

# 15. Independent Observers

15.1 An Independent Observer would not normally be used at a research degree examination, but may be appointed by the Dean of the Graduate and Researcher College in the following circumstances:

* Where there are two External Examiners (and no Internal Examiner) appointed.
* Where the appointment of an Independent Observer (to oversee the process) is determined to be advisable.

15.2 The Independent Observer will not act as an examiner of the thesis. They will:

* oversee and maintain an independent record of the oral examination and assist the examiners in following University procedure;
* consider the reports from the examiners prior to the viva;
* hold a pre-meeting with the examiners to confirm how the viva will be coordinated and advise on procedures;
* introduce the examiners to the student at the beginning of the viva and explain the examination process;
* be present throughout the viva but not take an active role in questioning the student;
* ensure that the oral examination is conducted properly and according to good practice;
* be present while the examiners reach their decision, so as to be able to advise them on the options open to them under the University procedures;
* provide an independent view on the conduct of the examination (where required).

15.3 The Independent Observer will be a member of staff with substantial experience in examining research degrees who has not been involved with the student’s research supervision, progression monitoring or examination at any stage during their period of registration. The Independent Observer will normally be appointed from outside the student’s subject area.

# 16.  Further Guidance

Under no circumstances should candidates contact their Internal or External Examiners, or any Independent Observer, about their research degree examination outside of the formal examination process. The Division should make this clear to the candidate when the examiners are appointed.

1. Member of staff employed by the university in substantive academic roles does not include informal or timesheet paid staff such as graduate teaching assistants or hourly paid lecturers. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)