

PROCEDURE AND GUIDANCE FOR INDEPENDENT CHAIRS FOR RESEARCH DEGREE VIVAS

Summary

1. In some circumstances it may be appropriate for a viva to be chaired by an independent member of academic staff.
2. An independent Chair may be appointed in the following circumstances:
 - a) Viva is following an 18 month resubmission of a thesis
 - b) Proposed internal examiner does not have any experience in PhD examining
 - c) There are circumstances affecting the student that make it desirable to have an independent chair present at the viva
 - d) At the specific request of the student.
3. If an independent chair is to be appointed this must be mutually agreed between the supervisor and the student.

Selection of Chairs

4. The Research Student Unit will invite departments to propose a number of candidates to volunteer to enter a pool of independent chairs. Chairs will not be expected to chair more than 3 vivas per academic year.

Procedure

5. Supervisors will inform student whether they think it is preferable that an independent chair is to be appointed, ahead of proposing PhD examiners.
6. Supervisors will indicate requirement for independent chair on the Examiner Nomination Form
7. Student will confirm awareness of appointment of independent chair on Examination Entry form.

Criteria

8. Independent Chairs must be:
 - From a different School than the student and supervisor
 - Experienced in examining PhDs
 - Experienced in PhD supervision (to completion)
 - Aware of the Birkbeck and University of London PGR regulations
 - Have experience in chairing meetings
9. Chairs will not be expected to chair more than 3 vivas per academic year.

Role of an Independent Chair

10. The role of an Independent Chair is to oversee the oral examination to ensure that the examination is conducted fairly and in accordance with the University Regulations.
11. The Independent Chair is not required to have any knowledge of the thesis or the discipline area and, although sits in on the deliberations of the examiners when the First Supervisor and candidate are not present, is not involved with the Examiners' assessment of the candidate
12. The Duties of an Independent Chair are as follows:
 - To ensure the viva is conducted fairly and in accordance with the College regulations.
 - To provide an independent view in response to any queries or appeals following the viva
 - The chair does not have the right to participate in the examination of the candidate or comment on the proposed outcome of the examination.
 - The chair can stop the examination if they consider that the examination is not focused on whether the candidate has satisfied the criteria for the degree.
 - The chair will submit a report after the viva outlining whether the examination was conducted fairly and in accordance with College regulations.

Viva arrangements

13. The supervisor will liaise with the Chair and examiners to set a suitable date and time for the oral examination.
14. The student will submit three hard copies to the Registry (instead of the normal two). One of these copies will be sent by Registry to the Independent Chair, along with all the examination paperwork that is usually sent to the examiners, and a copy of the Guidance for Independent Chairs for Research Degree Vivas.
15. The Independent Chair does not need to read the thesis, as they are not required to examine it.

Independent Chair's report

16. After the viva, the Chair is asked to submit a short report to the Research Student Unit in Registry, outlining whether the viva was conducted fairly and according to College regulations, and anything of note that may have taken place during the examination. This report should be submitted to the Research Student Unit within two weeks of the oral examination.