

The following guidelines are intended to make clear the role of the Chair and the responsibilities associated with the post.

At the discretion of the Degree Committee, an Independent Chair is appointed by the Degree Committee to oversee examinations for the PhD degree. An Independent Chair will normally be appointed:

1. where two external examiners have been appointed neither of whom are experienced Cambridge examiners in the view of the Degree Committee;
2. where the internal examiner is inexperienced in the view of the Degree Committee;
3. in cases of re-examination;
4. for any candidate for whom the Degree Committee has identified concerns regarding the examination;
5. if the candidate has satisfied the Degree Committee that a Chair is required;
6. in any other circumstances where the Degree Committee has satisfied itself that the appointment is required.

Degree Committees may inform the Chair of the reason(s) for their appointment (based on the 6 options above). Where the Chair has been appointed as a result of particular examination [access arrangements](#) being put in place, the Chair should receive the same information on the arrangements as the Examiners. The Chair must not have had any prior involvement with the project or with the student and must not be a member of the candidate's Faculty or College.

Independent Chairs will receive a payment of £50.

Background

It is the responsibility of the Chair to ensure that, as appropriate, he/she is familiar with:

1. The University's Regulations for the Degrees of Doctor of Philosophy, Master of Science and Master of Letters;
2. The University's Code of Practice for Research Degrees;
3. University policy and regulations regarding academic misconduct (including plagiarism)

Role of the Independent Chair

The primary role of the Chair is to ensure that the student is examined fairly and in accordance with University regulations, in particular:

1. The viva voce examination process is rigorous, fair, reliable and consistent;
2. The student has the opportunity to defend the thesis and respond to all questions posed by the examiners;
3. Questioning by the examiners is conducted fairly and professionally;
4. The examiners adhere to the University's regulations and procedures, giving advice regarding the regulations to both the examiners and the student if required;
5. The examiners' preliminary independent reports have been completed prior to the examination;
6. That the examiners' joint report is completed at the end of the examination and that the reports are submitted to the Degree Committee in a timely fashion.

The Chair is not expected to question the student about the work being examined and it is not expected that the Chair should receive or read a copy of the thesis in preparation for the examination.

In the case of disagreement between the examiners, the Chair's role is confined to advising the examiners on their options; the Chair does not have an additional casting vote but should use his/her best endeavours to help the examiners to reach an agreed position.

The Viva Voce Examination

At the start of the examination, the Chair should introduce the examiners and student. The Chair should also explain that he/she is independent of the examination process and is present to ensure that points i) to vi) above are adhered to.

During the examination and the discussion held afterwards, the Chair should intervene only if he or she feels it necessary to do so for example:

1. To provide advice on regulations, procedures, policy and practice;
2. Where the Chair feels that there is activity that is not 'rigorous, fair, reliable or consistent';
3. Where the Chair feels that there is activity which contravenes the University's Equality and Diversity Policy.

During the course of the examination, the Chair may feel it appropriate to call a temporary break in the examination in order to speak with the examiners in private.

When the examiners have finished their discussions with the candidate, the Chair should ensure that everyone, including the candidate, has had an opportunity to ask any questions.

The Chair should draw the proceedings to a close and explain the next steps in the procedure. Ordinarily, the Chair will ask the candidate to withdraw from the room while the examiners consider the outcome(s) of the examination and their recommendation to the Degree Committee.

Examination Outcomes

Following the first examination for the PhD (Form PhD2)

The examiners will make one of the following recommendations:

1. that the PhD Degree is approved without correction
2. that the PhD Degree is approved subject to minor or straightforward correction;
3. that the PhD degree is approved subject to more substantial, or less straightforward corrections;
4. that the student is allowed to revise and resubmit the thesis for examination for the PhD;
5. that the student is allowed to resubmit the thesis for examination for the PhD, or accept the MLitt/MSc degree without further revision;
6. that the student is not allowed to revise the thesis for the PhD but offered the MLitt or MSc without further revision or examination of the thesis;
7. that the student is not allowed to revise the thesis for the PhD degree but allowed to revise the thesis for the MLitt or MSc only;

8. that the student is not approved nor allowed to revise the thesis for any examination-outright failure.

Following the examination of a revised thesis for the PhD degree (Form PhDrev2)

The examiners will make one of the following recommendations:

1. that the PhD Degree is approved without correction;
2. that the PhD Degree is approved subject to minor or straightforward correction;
3. that the PhD degree is approved subject to more substantial, or less straightforward corrections;
4. the student is not approved for the PhD degree but offered the MLitt or MSc degree;
5. that the student is not approved nor allowed to revise the thesis for any examination - outright failure.

Academic Misconduct

In the event that, during the examination, the examiners have reason to believe that the candidate has committed an act of academic misconduct (essentially plagiarism or falsification of results), the Chair will inform the Degree Committee that the examiners have such concerns.

It is not for the Chair or the Examiners to determine at the examination that academic misconduct has or has not taken place. In the interests of fairness, it is important that the proper procedures are followed.

Should the examination raise concerns either in respect to the conduct of the viva itself, or in respect to the management of / provision of resources for the research project the Chair should supplement the form with a written report to the Degree Committee Office.