

Guidance on the Appointment and Role of the Independent Chair

It is a regulatory requirement that their viva is either recorded (audio) or is conducted in the presence of an Independent Chair.

Please note: In the event that the appointed Independent Chair is unable to attend the viva examination, an audio recording must be made in line with the 'Guidance on the Audio Recording of Vivas' (see <http://www.rhul.ac.uk/ecampus/academicsupport/examinations/researchdegrees/supervisors.aspx>)

Nomination of an Independent Chair

The Independent Chair should be nominated in section D of the MPhil/PhD Exam Entry form and should:

- be an academic member of staff from the same or cognate discipline as the candidate but should not be the Head of Department or School. The Director of Graduate Studies from the candidate's department may often decide to take on this role
- not be a member of the candidate's supervisory team, nor have played any significant part in the project or the assessment of the candidate (e.g. formal annual review or upgrade review)
- have substantial experience of conducting Research Degree viva examinations (minimum of three)
- have experience of supervising Research Degree students
- be familiar with the Royal Holloway research degree examining process, procedures and regulations
- have experience of chairing meetings

Please note that the Independent Chair nomination will need to be approved by the CBEEC just as the nominated examiners are (for further details, please refer to: <http://www.rhul.ac.uk/ecampus/academicsupport/examinations/researchdegrees/supervisors.aspx>)

Prior to the Viva

- The Independent Chair will be formally invited by Student Administration once their nomination has been approved.
- The examiners will be informed in their invitation letter that an Independent Chair will be present at the viva and a 'Guidance on the Role of the Independent Chair' will be provided.
- Student Administration will send the Independent Chair a copy of the candidate's thesis for information purposes only. This will normally be sent electronically unless the Chair indicates that they would prefer a hard copy. The Chair is not expected to read the thesis in detail.
- The Independent Chair will also be sent an 'Independent Chair Report on Viva' form which is to be completed at the end of the viva to indicate that the viva has been conducted satisfactorily.
- The Independent Chair is expected to familiarise themselves with the regulations governing the award of the relevant degree in order to be able to advise the examiners as required.

On the Day of the Viva

The Independent Chair should:

1. attend the pre-viva meeting with the examiners and assist the examiners in setting an agenda for the viva examination
2. introduce the examiners and candidate and outline the procedure for the examination and its key purposes
3. ensure that all main items on the agenda are addressed and that the candidate is given the opportunity to respond to all questions asked by the examiners
4. ensure that each of the examiners has a proper opportunity to contribute to the examination process
5. ensure that the examination is conducted fairly and in accordance with the College's regulations, policies and procedures.
6. ensure that the supervisor, if present, only acts as an observer and agrees to maintain confidentiality in respect of the content of the examination
7. ensure that if the supervisor is present, they are asked to withdraw from the room before the candidate does in order to provide the candidate with an opportunity to say anything to the examiners that they would prefer to say without the supervisor being present
8. at the end of the viva examination, ensure that actions required of the candidate and the examiners are clear and understood by all parties
9. ensure that the candidate is asked to withdraw before the examiners begin their final deliberations
10. complete the 'Independent Chair Report' form to indicate that they are satisfied that the viva has been conducted in accordance with the College's regulations, policies and procedures. This form should be returned to Student Administration directly after the viva examination.
11. request that the examiners complete and return the Final Joint Report form and Decision Report form to Student Administration within two weeks of the viva examination.