

Guidelines for the Appointment of External Examiners for Postgraduate Research Degrees by Research & Thesis

1. Introduction.

The University of Limerick (UL) is responsible for the establishment and ratification of both Undergraduate and Postgraduate Degree awards in alignment with the Irish National Framework of Qualifications. In accordance with academic regulations, UL formally appoints an external examiner(s) for the examination of each research degree to evaluate the quality and academic standards of its postgraduate research theses, in line with international best practice. The University is also required to assure the quality of validated programmes delivered by its linked educational providers under the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Act 2012 and Ireland's Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes (QQI 2019).

Having regard to the University's stated commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion, insofar as possible, Heads of Departments/Schools must ensure balanced gender representation in the appointment the members of examination panel for postgraduate research degree awards. Where this is not feasible, the appointment of the Independent Chair where possible, should reflect a balanced gender representation.

As per the University's Academic Regulations Chapter 5 Section 14 (Examination Procedures) for postgraduate research degree awards, external examiner(s) must be appointed for each candidate being. No distinction shall be made, for the purposes of appointing external examiners, between Master's by Research and PhD.

2. Scope.

The scope of this policy relates to the appointment of external examiners for postgraduate research degrees, namely, by Master's by Research & Thesis and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD).

3. Key Competencies and Expertise

As per Academic Regulations. 5.14.9: *The external examiner shall normally be an academic staff member of a recognised third-level institution and shall have a formal academic and/or professional qualification as well as expertise in the subject area and knowledge of the academic standards required for a PhD degree in the research area of the thesis being examined. Evidence of these requirements should be included in the external examiner's curriculum vitae, which accompanies the nomination of examiners for research degrees form. The external examiner shall not be a member of or affiliated to the University of Limerick or Mary Immaculate College.*

Regarding the appointment of an External examiner, the following should be considered:

- Experience in supervising PhD students to completion and the examination process at PhD level.
- Where feasible/appropriate, International External Examiner(s) should be appointed.

- In advance of the relevant University Examination Board, availability and agreement to review postgraduate Research theses within specified time deadlines and to be available to attend such oral examinations and/or examiners meetings as are appropriate.

4. Impartiality

For quality assurance, the external examiner(s) must be independent of the University of its internal examiners, supervisors, and of the candidates presenting themselves for examination. Thus, it is imperative that all external examiners:

- An external examiner cannot examine more than two theses in any five-year period for the University of Limerick. This does not affect their role as external examiner on UL Taught Postgraduate Programmes.
- Should not have been in the employment of the University (in any capacity) in the five years prior to appointment.
- Adjunct Faculty who hold a position within the University of Limerick are not eligible for nomination for appointment as an External Examiner.
- Should not have been a student at the University of Limerick in the five years prior to their appointment as an external examiner.
- Should not in the past five years, have been a beneficiary of any bursary or remuneration from the University, exceptions being, from positions such as, a member of accreditation panel; member of quality review panel; member of recruitment/promotions panel or similar.
- Should not have a close personal, research or professional relationship with internal examiner, supervisors or a candidate, where it could be interpreted as entailing a conflict of interest. For Example,
 - Should not have assisted/advised the postgraduate research student on the work underpinning the preparation of the thesis.
 - Have previously been involved in the supervision or assessment of the candidate.
 - Should not have be involved with the candidate in a co-publication capacity or funding grant applications/proposals.
 - Should not have be involved with the internal examiner or supervisor(s) in a co-publication capacity or funding grant applications/proposals.
- Evidence of the aforementioned requirements should be included in the external examiner's curriculum vitae, which accompanies the nomination of examiners form.