**Appointment, role and responsibilities of the Independent Chair**

The primary consideration for appointment of the Independent Chair is that they must understand the University of Nottingham viva voce processes and expectations/outcomes of research degree examination well enough to perform all the duties and responsibilities detailed below, to ensure rigour and consistency in the examination process. The Chair is not required to be a member of academic staff, nor to be a specialist in the field of study under examination but they should have sufficient experience and understanding of the conduct of viva voce examinations or have supported the conduct of such examinations to fulfil the responsibilities below.

The Independent Chair should not be a member of staff who has been directly involved with monitoring or pastoral support of the PGR during the period of study, or who is a close collaborator with the research supervisors or internal examiner.

It is the responsibility of the Independent Chair to raise and discuss any potential conflicts of interest that they may have when they are first approached to act. They should not accept the role if potential conflicts of interest cannot be managed appropriately.

The Head of School or appropriate delegate (e.g. PGR director, internal examiner or supervisor(s) depending on the circumstances) should make the Independent Chair aware of any [reasonable adjustments required for disabled PGRs](https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/qualitymanual/personal-tutoring-student-support-and-development/examination-arrangements-disabled-students.aspx) that have been made to the form or content of the examination.

Retired members of staff may act as Independent Chairs within three years of their retirement.

The Independent Chair’s duties and responsibilities are to:

* Attend the pre-viva meeting with the examiners prior to the oral examination, and be made aware of any concerns from the examiners, particularly if either or both examiners believe the thesis to be seriously flawed and not on target to merit consideration for the degree to be awarded.
* At the pre-viva meeting, discuss whether there are any existing conflicts of interest that need to be managed and keep a note of this discussion and any conflict management required.
* Be present for the duration of the examination and post-viva discussions ensuring that the University’s regulations and Guidance for Examiners of Research degrees are followed.
* Preside over the viva proceedings, welcoming and introducing participants and verifying the identity of the candidate, explaining the process including the role of the Chair, and making sure the candidate is comfortable and ready to start.
* Take brief notes on progress (preferably by hand so as not to disturb the candidate and examiners) with a time line. The notes on the viva should be kept by the Independent Chair in case of need in an appeal or complaint.
* Record information on any issues experienced during the viva on the joint report, particularly any deviation from usual process.
* Record any difficulties experienced by the candidate in responding, and whether this was due to their understanding or due to the technology/format being used should also be noted on the joint report.
* Provide a short report on the conduct of the viva to be submitted with the joint examiners’ report.
* Know how to contact the supervisors in case they are required.
* Make clear the expectations indicating the likely duration of the examination, the ability of the candidate and examiners to request brief breaks as necessary, and ensuring that all parties have everything to hand that they require.
* Ensure that the viva voce examination is not recorded by any party.
* Ask whether both examiners are satisfied that they have enough information to come to an examination decision regarding the candidate at the end of the questioning period. If they agree, the chair should also ask the student whether they have any further points they would like to raise.
* Ask the candidate (and other support personnel present) to leave the room to allow the examiners to confer and come to a decision.
* Ensure that the candidate has appropriate follow up after the viva.

AND for online vivas,

* Offer a test call with all parties separately ahead of the viva.
* Collect and hold telephone numbers of all parties for effective communication in case the viva has to be halted due to technical difficulties.
* Circulate any presentation that the candidate is required to present to the examiners at least one week ahead of the viva.
* Ensure consistency in the conduct of vivas using digital/online formats as compared to those conducted when all participants are located together in person.
* Confirm that all parties are present, and only the invited parties are admitted and present, that they are comfortable with the arrangements and that the candidates and the examiners can see and hear each other clearly.
* Actively monitor the quality of the connection, and in the case of occasional breakdowns/pauses in either the video or the audio link ensure that any discussion is repeated and that no misunderstanding has occurred.
* Offer breaks of 5-10 min at least every ~60 minutes, depending on the needs of the candidate and examiners. If the candidate is showing signs of stress/distress, suspending the viva voce examination and allowing the candidate a short break to compose themselves. In very extreme cases, the Chair has the right to suspend the viva voce examination indefinitely; in such a case, the Head of School or delegate (e.g. PGR director) must be informed immediately for advice of how to proceed. If the latter is not available, then the Independent Chair should use their judgement on how to proceed until advice can be sought
* Make the decision about whether the viva continues in the event of a serious or protracted breakdown in the connection of more than 20 minutes. However, if it is clear before 20 minutes are up that re-connection cannot be made the viva should be postponed.
* Ensure the duration of the viva is not excessive, especially in light of the format
* Ensure that any post viva decisions and comments are based solely on the candidate’s performance and assessment of achieved outcomes, and do not reflect issues related to the digital/online format of the viva.
* Provide an additional viewpoint if the conduct of the viva should become the subject of a student appeal.