**Circumstances under which an independent non-examining Independent Chair should be appointed for a viva voce examination**

When required, an Independent Chair is present primarily to ensure consistency between different viva voce examinations. They may also provide an additional viewpoint if the conduct of the viva should become the subject of a student appeal. Heads of School may apply to the Quality and Standards committee for permission to waive this requirement provided a good case can be made that an Independent Chair is not required and/or appropriate in a particular circumstance.

A non-examining Independent Chair must be appointed to the examination team in the following circumstances:

* when the viva voce is to be conducted through online/remote means.
* if reasonable adjustments *that could affect the conduct of the viva voce examination* have been made to the examination arrangements on the grounds of autistic spectrum conditions, disabilities, mental health difficulties, long-term health conditions, or specific learning differences*.*
* if the PGR has requested an independent Chair due to issues related to equality and diversity1. In these circumstances, the *general* reasons for the request may be communicated to the examiners to avoid misunderstanding or undue concern around the presence of the Independent Chair. Personal information relating to the reason for the request or information that might be prejudicial to the conduct of the examination should not be disclosed without the permission of the PGR.
* if the Head of School or delegate requests that an independent chair is appointed to ensure fairness and consistency of examination (e.g. following a referral, at re-examination of a thesis2), in which case the general reason should be communicated to the examiners and PGR to avoid misunderstanding or undue concern around the presence of the Independent Chair.
* the internal examiner has no previous UK doctoral or MPhil PGR examining experience3,4.

Notes:

1. If/when an Independent Chair is requested by the PGR on equality and diversity grounds, they may also request that the appointment made takes the diversity of the examining team into account.
2. A request for an Independent Chair from either the Head of School or PGR should not be inferred as an indication of any problem with the thesis. The regulations allow for an Independent Chair to be appointed under any circumstances to ensure consistency and fairness, and schools/research groups may opt to make this appointment for those reasons.
3. It is good practice, and encouraged, for schools/research groups to provide any new examiner with mentoring support to enable them to understand and develop the necessary skills to act as a PGR examiner.
4. When an Independent Chair is appointed when the internal examiner has no previous UK PGR examining experience, the external examiner should be informed by the internal examiner of the reason for the appointment.