

Subject Area Board Guidance

The Subject Area Board (SAB) is a vital part of the King's research degree examination process. The SAB receives all examiner nominations for its subject area and carries out quality assurance to ensure all nominations are appropriate and carried out in a suitable manner.

Supervisors choose which SAB they list on the RD1 form based on what they perceive to be the best fit for the subject area of the thesis, rather than the department that they and the candidate belong to. The Research Degrees Examinations team are unable to advise on which SAB a supervisor or candidate should choose.

The SAB will always consist of a Chair, Deputy Chair and at least one other member. There is some autonomy in how the SAB choose to manage the administrative duties and the number of members beyond the three required by King's regulations. This document forms the guidance for SAB members and supervisors and details King's expectations for SAB membership and operation.

1. Function

1.1 The function of the SAB is twofold:

- i) To advise on the expertise and suitability of nominated examiners;
- ii) To check for any potential conflicts of interest the supervisor or candidate may have with the nominated examiners. These could include, but are not limited to, collaborations, recent publications, joint grant funding, prior knowledge of the candidate, etc.

2. Membership

- 2.1 Each SAB must have at least three members, including a Chair and Deputy Chair. If the SAB Chair has an extended period of leave, the Deputy must either step up to the Chair position, or if this is not practicable, a new Chair appointed. This decision must be communicated to the Research Degrees Examinations team at researchdegrees@kcl.ac.uk in order to avoid delays to the exam process.
- 2.2 Any changes in membership must be confirmed via email to the Research Degrees Examinations team in order for the records to be updated.

- 2.3 If a member leaves and the Chair or other members are not sure how to recruit a new member, they should contact the faculty Associate Dean for Doctoral Studies who will be able to advise and place an advertisement for SAB membership.

3. Operational Guidelines

- 3.1 A full list of SABs will be published on the Research Degrees webpage so supervisors and candidates can decide the best SAB for their subject. Note that the list does not include individual members
- 3.2 The Research Degrees Examinations team will submit the RD1 form to all members of the SAB that is chosen by the supervisor and candidate.
- 3.3 SAB members should consult on whether the examiners meet the criteria detailed in the Academic Regulations. It is expected that this will take place within one week of receipt of the RD1 form.
- 3.4 Once a decision has been agreed by a quora of at least one third of the membership, or a minimum of two members (whichever is greater), the Chair (or nominated approver) must submit the outcome to the Research Degrees Examinations team.
- 3.5 If the SAB has concerns regarding an examiner, the SAB Chair (or nominated approver) may get in touch with the supervisor to address the problem(s) or request additional information. They may also ask the supervisor to nominate an alternative examiner or an Independent Chair.
- 3.6 It is permissible for SAB members to take external advice, or advice from another SAB, but it should not unduly delay the approval process.
- 3.7 If the candidate's supervisor is a member of the requested SAB, they will not be included in the approval of nominations email and should not be involved in any SAB discussions.
- 3.8 If the SAB have a procedural or administrative query this must be referred directly to the Research Degrees Examinations team and not to the examiners, supervisor or candidate.
- 3.9 In cases where examiners have insufficient experience in the examination of UK based PhDs, but it is felt they would be best placed to examine the candidate and their thesis, an Independent Chair should be advised and appointed. The supervisor has the responsibility of finding the Independent Chair, though the SAB is welcome to make suggestions.
- 3.10 An internal examiner from within the university will be accepted only in exceptional circumstances. In particular, the use of an examiner from the same department is strongly discouraged and a very strong justification (usually in terms of specialist expertise) is required.

- 3.11 Where international examiners are appointed, they must be the most appropriate person for the role, and this must be fully justified in the RD1 Form. Where expenses exceed the maximum permitted by the Research Degrees Examinations team, these must be paid by the candidate's department.
- 3.12 The appointment of recently retired or emeritus examiners is acceptable if they are still research active, but one examiner should have a current appointment with a UK university of good research standing.
- 3.13 Following the SAB approval of examiner nominations, the decision and any comments will be sent to the RDEB Chair for final approval. In some cases, the Chair may require further information from the SAB or reject a nomination on various grounds, as per King's regulations.

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