

# Nomination of Examiners Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Please use these FAQs to assist with the nomination of examiners and in conjunction with the Australian Council of Graduate Research (ACGR) Conflict of Interest in Examination Guidelines

## Who is involved in the nomination of examiners process?

Graduate research students, their supervisory panel, Faculty and the Graduate Research School play important roles in the nomination of examiner process.

## What are the key considerations in nominating examiners?

The following factors should be considered when nominating examiners:

- Internationally recognised expertise in the field and in the methodological approach as indicated by the examiner's research track record, positions held, publications;
- Level of qualifications, which should be at least at the level of the thesis being examined;
- Their current or recent academic or research position in a university, research institute or relevant industry;
- Their experience as an examiner.
- Conflict of interest - examiners must not have a real or perceived conflict of interest with the graduate research student, supervisory panel, faculty or university.

## What is the process of nominating examiners?

1. The graduate research student:

The supervisory panel and graduate research student must discuss a potential list of examiners before the thesis is submitted for examination. Graduate research students have the right to advise their principal supervisor of the names of potential examiners with whom they may have some concern and wish to exclude from the potential list of examiners.

The graduate research student commences the nomination of examiner process by listing potential examiners discussed with the supervisory panel on the nomination of examiner form and declaring any conflicts of interest

2. The principal supervisor:

On behalf of the supervisory panel, the principal supervisor nominates at least 2 examiners out of the potential list of examiners to proceed to examination. The

supervisor will declare any conflicts of interest on behalf of the supervisory panel and submit the form to the faculty research office for endorsement by the RAO

3. The Faculty:

The faculty will declare conflicts of interest and endorse the application for submission to the GRS.

4. The Graduate Research School:

The GRS will declare conflicts of interest and endorse or reject nomination.

## What do I need to know about Conflict of Interest and Examiners?

The engagement of independent examiners is a key feature of the Australian Higher Degree Research assessment process. A complete nationally endorsed [guide](#) (external PDF) to potential conflicts of interest (COI) in examination is available from the [Australian Council of Graduate Research](#). This provides detailed examples of conflict of interest considerations by the graduate research student, supervisory panel, and university.

This guide should be used by all those who have a role in the nomination of examiner process to assess potential conflicts of interest, choose examiners for whom there is no conflict of interest and/or disclose perceived conflicts of interest.

The identification of an actual or potential conflict of interest does not necessarily exclude a proposed examiner from examining a thesis. In many cases, a proposed examiner may be the most appropriate person to assess the research, even if a conflict of interest exists.

The Faculty and the Graduate Research School will assess any potential or actual conflicts of interest raised by the student and/or the supervisory panel. It is therefore important in this assessment process, to identify and document any potential or actual conflicts of interest, and the Supervisor/Faculty should make a case to justify the inclusion of the examiner.

The aim of the assessment process is to ensure that all UTS graduate research students are examined fairly and equitably, and that the credentials of higher degree by research graduates from UTS is unimpeachable. It is not uncommon for the Graduate Research School to request further information to assist with approval of examiners with a perceived or actual conflicts of interest.

## What are students' considerations regarding examiner COI?

### Graduate research students:

1. When assessing for conflict with potential examiners, students need to consider the following:

Conflict with the Candidate in a working relationship (major):

- Examiner has co-authored a paper with the candidate within the last five years
- Examiner has worked with the candidate on matters regarding the thesis e.g. previous member of the advisory team

- Examiner has employed the candidate or been employed by the candidate within the last five years
- Examiner is in negotiation to directly employ or be employed by the candidate
- Examiner has acted as a referee for the candidate for employment

**Conflict with the Candidate in a personal relationship (major):**

- Examiner is a known relative of the candidate
- Examiner is a friend, associate or mentor of the candidate
- Examiner and the candidate have an existing or a previous emotional relationship of de facto, are co-residents or are members of a common household

**Conflict with the Candidate in a legal relationship (major):**

- Examiner is or was married to the candidate
- Examiner is legally family to the candidate (for example, step-father, sister-in-law)
- Examiner is either a legal guardian or dependent of the candidate or has power of attorney for the candidate

**Conflict with the Candidate in a business, professional and/or social relationship (major):**

- Examiner is currently in or has had a business relationship with the candidate in the last five years (for example, partner in a small business)
- Examiner is in a social relationship with the candidate, such as co-Trustees of a Will or god-parent

**Conflict with the Candidate in a business, professional and/or social relationship (minor):**

- Examiner has a current professional relationship, such as shared membership of a Board or Committee (including editorial and grant decision boards), with the candidate
- Examiner has had personal contact with the candidate that may give rise to the perception that the examiner may be dealing with the candidate in a less than objective manner

**2. Review all conflicts of interest identified**

**3. Discuss any conflict of interest identified with Supervisor and broader supervisory panel and if required to proceed, justify the nomination**

## What are the supervisors' considerations regarding examiner COI?

**The Supervisory Panel:**

**1. When considering the conflict with potential examiners, Supervisors will need to consider the following:**

**Conflict with the Supervisor/Advisor in a working relationship (major):**

- Examiner was a candidate of the supervisor within the past five years
- Examiner has co-supervised with the supervisor in the past five years
- Examiner holds a patent with the supervisor granted no more than eight years ago and which is still in force

- Examiner has directly employed or was employed by the supervisor in the past five years
- Examiner holds a current grant with the supervisor
- Examiner has co-authored a publication with the supervisor in the past five years

Conflict with the Supervisor/Advisor in a personal relationship (major):

- Examiner is in negotiation to directly employ or be employed by the supervisor
- Examiner is a known relative of the supervisor
- Examiner and the supervisor have an existing or a previous emotional relationship of de facto, are co-residents or are members of a common household

Conflict with the Supervisor/Advisor in a legal relationship (major):

- Examiner is or was married to the supervisor
- Examiner is legally family (for example, step-father, sister-in-law) to the Supervisor
- Examiner is either a legal guardian or dependent of the supervisor or has power of attorney for the supervisor

Conflict with the Supervisor/Advisor in a business, professional and/or social relationship (major):

- Examiner is currently in or has had a business relationship with the supervisor in the last five years (for example, partner in a small business or employment)
- Examiner is in a social relationship with the supervisor, such as co-Trustees of a Will or god-parent

Conflict with the Supervisor/Advisor in a business, professional and/or social relationship (minor):

- Examiner has a current professional relationship, such as shared membership of a Board or Committee (including editorial and grant decision boards), with the supervisor
- Examiner has had personal contact with the supervisor that may give rise to the perception that the examiner may be dealing with the candidate in a less than objective manner

2. Supervisors must specifically consider all of the major conflict items; under certain circumstances, there may be acceptable potential conflict, such as in areas where they have co-published or are collaborators on a grant especially if the grants are held by a large consortium and the relationship between the proposed examiner and the supervisor is not a close collaborative relationship.

Similarly a publication by a large group of authors including the supervisor and proposed examiner where there was not a collaborative arrangement in place should be raised and the explanatory case for inclusion of the examiner made in the nomination form.

3. When considering the nominated examiners, the examiner's online profile, and when provided, their CV, may be valuable for identifying potential conflicts such as shared publications or grants. If unsure of a potential conflict or there are mitigating circumstances this can be flagged to the Faculty Responsible Academic Officer.
4. Where possible Supervisors are also required to consider and if relevant identify the following conflict:

Conflict with the subject (research) matter (major)

- Examiner has a direct commercial interest in the outcomes of the research

Conflict with other examiners (working relationship) (major)

- Examiner works in the same department/school as another examiner

Conflict with other examiners (personal relationship) (major)

- Examiner is married to, closely related to or has a close personal relationship with another examiner

Conflict with other examiners (professional relationship) (major)

- Examiner has a professional relationship with another examiner

If the above details are not already known by the Supervisors, some information might be available from the CV and/or online profile. If in doubt, please alert the Faculty Responsible Academic Officer.

## What are the University's considerations regarding examiner COI?

The **University** level conflict is declared both at Faculty level and at the Graduate Research School level.

The **Faculty** will:

1. assess the nomination of examiners and consider the following:

Conflicts with the University (major):

- Examiner is currently in negotiation with the University for a work contract (other than examining thesis)\*
- Examiner is currently working for the University pro bono (for example, on a review)
- Examiner has received an Honorary Doctorate from the University within the past five years
- Examiner graduated from the University within the past five years
- Examiner has/had a formal grievance with the University
- Examiner is a current member of staff or has a current Honorary, Adjunct or Emeritus position with the University or has had such a position during the candidature of the candidate or in the past five years\*

Conflicts with the University (minor):

- Examiner has examined for the University two or more times in the past 12 months and/or five or more times in the past five years
- Examiner has a current professional relationship with the University (for example, membership of a Board or Committee)
- Examiner has a current Visiting position with The University or has had such a position during the candidature of the candidate or in the past five years\*

2. In addition to reviewing potential or actual conflicts of interest raised by students and Supervisors, the Faculty is required to consider conflict items that have been starred in the above list(s). If the information is not available on the proposed examiner CV provided or their online profile, the Faculty Manager and/or the Faculty HR Relationship Manager may be able to assist.

## What is the Graduate Research School's role in assessing COI?

The GRS will:

1. Assess the nomination of examiners for the following types of conflicts:

Conflicts with the university:

- Examiner is currently working for the University pro bono (for example, on a review)
- Examiner has examined for the University two or more times in the past 12 months and/or five or more times in the past five years
- Examiner has received an Honorary Doctorate from the University within the past five years
- Examiner graduated from the University within the past five years
- Examiner has/had a formal grievance with the University
- Examiner has a current professional relationship with the University (for example, membership of a Board or Committee)

Conflicts with other examiners:

- Examiner works in the same department/school as another examiner
- Examiner is married to, closely related to or has a close personal relationship with another examiner
- Examiner has a professional relationship with another examiner

2. Review all conflicts of interest identified by student, supervisory panel and Faculty,
3. Bring any conflict of interested identified to the Dean for consider