

# Appointment of HDR Examiners and Chairperson of Examiners

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## 1.0 Purpose

These Guidelines support the *Higher Degree by Research Policy* and *Higher Degree by Research Examination Procedure* by setting out the process and requirements for the nomination and appointment of examiners and Chairpersons of Examiners for the examination of a higher degree by research (HDR) thesis.

## 2.0 Scope

These Guidelines apply to all staff responsible for the nomination and appointment of HDR examiners and staff and examiners involved in managing the examination of HDR theses at the University.

## 3.0 Guidelines

HDR theses will be examined by appropriately qualified examiners who are independent of the conduct of the research and free from bias either for or against the candidate. An examiner will not be involved in the examination of a thesis if there is a major (actual or perceived) conflict of interest between the examiner and the candidate, the supervisors, the University, the subject matter itself or another examiner. These guidelines assure that, in the examination of HDR theses, examiners undertake the task independently and without bias.

For the purpose of these guidelines, the term 'principal supervisor' refers to the administrative principal supervisor in either a single principal or co-principal supervisory arrangement (see also the *Higher Degree by Research Supervision Procedure*). The principal supervisor acts as the representative of all members of the supervisory team, including associate and external supervisors, when nominating examiners, including in identifying and disclosing any real or perceived conflicts of interest with the examiners (see section 3.3).

### 3.1 Nomination and Appointment of Examiners - Process

1. Once a candidate's Notice of Intention to Submit form has been approved, the principal supervisor will be assigned, via a service request, the Nomination of Examiners form to complete.
2. The principal supervisor will nominate three examiners and a Chairperson of Examiners, all of whom meet the relevant requirements as specified in these guidelines. Prior to nominating, and where the principal supervisor supports the submission of the thesis, they will approach all three of the potential examiners to determine their willingness to examine. When contacting potential examiners, supervisors should provide them with:
  - The candidate's name.
  - A likely submission date.
  - Research title and abstract.

- The expected timeframe for the examiner to provide their report on the thesis (i.e. up to four weeks for a masters (research) thesis, up to six weeks for a Master of Philosophy or doctoral thesis).
- Information on the thesis format (e.g. if it is a creative work with exegesis, the form in which the creative output will be provided).

Supervisors should also confirm that potential examiners are willing to receive a digital copy of the candidate's submission, attend an exhibition (if applicable) and sign a confidentiality agreement (if applicable). (See the [example email invitation from the principal supervisor to an examiner](#) for the text that supervisors are asked to draw on to frame their invitation).

3. Following the principal supervisor's completion of the nomination of the examiners and Chairperson of Examiners (including identifying and explaining any real or perceived conflicts of interest as per section 3.3), the form will workflow to the HDR Convenor and then to the Dean (Research) as the approver for appointment of HDR examiners. In considering the appointment, the Dean (Research) will review the nominated examiners against the requirements set out in section 3.2 and the conflict of interest guidelines detailed in section 3.3.

### 3.2 Appointment of Examiners - Requirements

1. The three examiners nominated by the principal supervisor will meet the following requirements:
  - Have international standing in the field of research:
    - International standing may be demonstrated by factors including publication record, employment record, evidenced contribution to the field, peer regard and esteem measures.
  - Be active in research in a discipline relevant to the thesis research and who can be expected to apply accepted, contemporary, international standards in their assessment of the research.
  - Hold a qualification at least equal to the level of the award they are examining or have equivalent professional experience<sup>1</sup>.
  - Have previous experience as a supervisor and/or examiner at the AQF level at which they will examine.
  - Be from different institutions to the other examiners nominated.
  - Be independent of the conduct of the research, without any real or perceived major conflict of interest, including those specified in section 3.3 below.

Additionally, examiners should have broad familiarity with the expectations of Australian HDR programs.

2. The examination panel nominated:
  - Must not be unduly narrow, geographically or institutionally. Ideally, at least one examiner should be based internationally for doctoral or Master of Philosophy examinations.
  - Should, through their disciplinary expertise, cover the full disciplinary range of the thesis, where the thesis topic is interdisciplinary or multi-disciplinary.
3. The Chairperson of Examiners nominated by the principal supervisor will:

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of these guidelines, 'equivalent professional experience' is defined as a record of demonstrated research ability and professional performance considered by the Dean (Research) as being equivalent to the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) learning outcomes of the degree being examined. Where an examiner does not hold the required qualification, a justification must be made in writing on the nomination form, providing evidence of equivalency, for Dean (Research) consideration.

- Be an academic staff member of Griffith University.
  - Have experience in the supervision and examination of HDR theses.
  - Be familiar with the broad field of research represented by the candidate’s thesis or, in the case of inter-disciplinary or multi-disciplinary theses, be familiar with part of the broad fields represented in the thesis.
  - Not have a real or perceived major conflict of interest with the candidate, supervisory team, the subject matter, an examiner or the University, as specified in section 3.3 below.
4. In addition to the requirements set out in section 3.2 (1) and (2), the table below sets out, for each type of HDR program, the number of examiners appointed and their status in relation to the University.

<b>HDR PROGRAM TYPE</b>	<b>NUMBER OF EXAMINERS</b>	<b>STATUS OF EXAMINERS</b>
Doctoral and Master of Philosophy programs	Two examiners plus a reserve examiner	All examiners are external to Griffith University
Masters (research) programs	Two examiners plus a reserve examiner	At least one of the two examiners must be external to Griffith University*
Doctoral or masters (research) programs where the thesis includes a live performance component <sup>^</sup>	Three examiners	Doctoral – all external to Griffith University Masters (research) – at least one examiner external to Griffith University

\*A masters (research) program may require both examiners to be external to the University. Where this is the case, it will be specified in the program requirements listed on the [Programs and Courses](#) website.

<sup>^</sup> For the purpose of these guidelines, ‘live’ refers to aspects of the thesis submission that are not able to be replicated in an examination context.

### **3.3 Conflict of Interest in Appointment of Examiners**

1. Professional and personal relationships between examiners and a candidate and their supervisors, and relationship between examiners and the University, have the potential to introduce bias and thus compromise the independence of the examination, in fact or perception.
2. Major conflicts of interest normally result in the non-appointment of an examiner whereas minor conflicts of interest do not, normally and independently of other considerations, prevent the appointment of an examiner but must be disclosed and explained.
3. Listed below are examples of the types of major and minor conflict of interest that may arise between the examiner and various parties including the candidate, the supervisor, the University, the subject matter itself and another examiner. These examples are based on the Australian Council of Graduate Research [Conflict of Interest in Examination Guidelines](#).
4. Examples marked with an asterisk (\*) do not apply to the nomination of the Chairperson of Examiners.

**TABLE ONE: CONFLICT WITH THE CANDIDATE**

<b>CONFLICT</b>	<b>CONFLICT LEVEL</b>
<b>WORKING RELATIONSHIP</b>	
A1. Examiner has co-authored a paper with the candidate	Major if within the past five years <sup>2</sup>
A2. Examiner has worked with the candidate on matters regarding the thesis e.g. previous member of the supervisory team	Major
A3. Examiner has employed the candidate or been employed by the candidate	Major if within the past five years <sup>2</sup>
A4. Examiner is in negotiation to directly employ or be employed by the candidate	Major
A5. Examiner has acted as a referee for the candidate for employment	Major
A6. Examiner has acted as an assessor for one of the candidate's HDR milestones	Major
<b>PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP</b>	
A7. Examiner is a known relative of the candidate	Major
A8. Examiner is a friend, associate or mentor of the candidate	Major
A9. Examiner and the candidate have an existing or previous emotional relationship of de facto, are co-residents or are members of a common household or have a godparent relationship	Major
<b>LEGAL RELATIONSHIP</b>	
A10. Examiner is or was married to the candidate	Major

<sup>2</sup> Where this activity has occurred over five years ago, the conflict will normally be considered minor however, each conflict will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

A11. Examiner is legally family to the candidate (e.g. step-father, sister-in-law)	Major
A12. Examiner is either a legal guardian or dependent of the candidate or has power of attorney for the candidate	Major
<b>BUSINESS, PROFESSIONAL AND/OR SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS</b>	
A13. Examiner is currently in or has had a business relationship with the candidate (e.g. partner in a small business)	Major if within the past five years <sup>2</sup>
A14. Examiner is in a social relationship with the candidate, such as co-Trustees of a Will	Major
A15. Examiner has a current professional relationship, such as shared membership of a Board or Committee (including editorial and grant decision boards), with the candidate	Minor
A16. Examiner has sponsored the candidate's studies during the last five years or during the candidature, whichever is longer (e.g. industry-funded scholarship)	Major
A17. 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	Minor <sup>3</sup>

## TABLE TWO: CONFLICT WITH THE SUPERVISOR

CONFLICT	CONFLICT LEVEL
<b>WORKING RELATIONSHIP</b>	
B1. Examiner was a candidate of the supervisor	Major if within the past five years <sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> A conflict of interest exists where a potential examiner has worked with the candidate on matters of synthesis or analysis or has maintained a correspondence or other contact over an extended period in which the research has been discussed. The following valuable activities are not considered a CoI as per ACGR Conflict of Interest Guidelines: Candidate attending a conference organised by the examiner; presenting papers in the department in which a potential examiner works; discussion with the potential examiner during a conference; submitting a paper to a journal edited by a potential examiner or refereed by a potential examiner.

<sup>4</sup> Where this activity has occurred over five years ago, the conflict will normally be considered minor however, each conflict will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

B2. Examiner has co-supervised with the supervisor	Major if within the past five years <sup>4</sup>
B3. Examiner holds a patent with the supervisor granted no more than eight years ago and/or which is still in force	Major
B4. Examiner has directly employed or was employed by the supervisor <sup>5</sup>	Major if within the past five years <sup>4</sup>
B5. Examiner holds or has held a grant with the supervisor or is currently co-writing a grant application	Major within the past five years <sup>4 6</sup>
B6. Examiner has co-authored a research output with the supervisor	Major within the past five years <sup>4 7</sup>
B7. Examiner has examined for the supervisor twice in the past 12 months and/or three times in the past five years	Major

### PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

B8. Examiner is in negotiation to directly employ or be employed by the supervisor	Major
B9. Examiner is a known relative of the supervisor	Major
B10. Examiner and the supervisor have an existing or previous emotional relationship of de facto, are co-residents or are members of a common household	Major

### LEGAL RELATIONSHIP

B11. Examiner is or was married to the supervisor	Major
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<sup>5</sup> Where the principal supervisor is also the Head of Element, the Chairperson of Examiners will normally be required to be external to that element.

<sup>6</sup> Mitigating circumstances may exist, e.g. where the grant in question is held by a large consortium of relatively independent researchers.

<sup>7</sup> Mitigating circumstances may exist, e.g. where the paper in question has a large author list and where the examiner and supervisors have not collaborated directly.

B12. Examiner is legally family to the supervisor (e.g. step-father, sister-in-law)	Major
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B13. Examiner is either a legal guardian or dependent of the supervisor or has power of attorney for the supervisor	Major
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**BUSINESS, PROFESSIONAL AND/OR SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS**

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B14. Examiner is currently in or has had a business relationship with the supervisor in the last five years (e.g. partner in a small business)	Major
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B15. Examiner is in a social relationship with the supervisor such as co-Trustees of a Will or godparent	Major
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B15. Examiner has a current professional relationship, such as shared membership of a Board or Committee (including editorial and grant decision boards), with the supervisor	Minor <sup>8</sup>
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B16. 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	Minor
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**TABLE THREE: CONFLICT WITH GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY**

CONFLICT	CONFLICT LEVEL
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**WORKING RELATIONSHIP**

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C1. Examiner is currently in negotiation with the University for a work contract (other than examining thesis)*	Major
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C2. Examiner is currently working for the University pro bono (e.g. on a review)*	Minor
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<sup>8</sup> Mitigating circumstances may exist, such as when the examiner and supervisor contribute to the same committee/grant panel but have not collaborated directly (subject to all other conflicts).

C3. 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*	Minor <sup>9</sup>
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**OTHER RELATIONSHIP**

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C4. Examiner has received an Honorary Doctorate from the University*	Major if within the past five years, minor otherwise
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C5. Examiner graduated from the University*	Major if within the past five years, minor otherwise
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C6. Examiner has/had a formal grievance with the University	Major
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**PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP**

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C7. 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*	Major if within the past five years, minor otherwise
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C8. Examiner has a current professional relationship with the University (e.g. membership of a Board or Committee*)	Minor
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C9. 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*	Minor
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**TABLE FOUR: CONFLICT WITH THE SUBJECT MATTER**

<b>CONFLICT</b>	<b>CONFLICT LEVEL</b>
<b>RESEARCH</b>	
D1. Examiner has a direct commercial interest in the outcomes of the research	Major

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<sup>9</sup> Mitigating circumstances may exist, e.g. where an examiner has examined candidates across different Schools of the University.



**TABLE FIVE: CONFLICT WITH OTHER EXAMINERS**

<b>CONFLICT</b>	<b>CONFLICT LEVEL</b>
<b>WORKING RELATIONSHIP</b>	
E1. Examiner works in the same department/school as another examiner*	Major
<b>PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP</b>	
E2. Examiner is married to, closely related to or has a close personal relationship with another examiner	Major
<b>PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP</b>	
E3. Examiner had a professional relationship with another examiner	Minor

## 4.0 Information

Title	Appointment of HDR Examiners and Chairperson of Examiners Guidelines
Document number	2023/0000497
Purpose	These Guidelines support the <i>Higher Degree by Research Policy</i> and <i>Higher Degree by Research Examination Procedure</i> by setting out the process and requirements for the nomination and appointment of examiners and Chairpersons of Examiners for the examination of a higher degree by research (HDR) thesis.
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Policy advisor                    HDR Operations Team Leader (Progress and Completions)

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Approving authority            Dean, Griffith Graduate Research School

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## **5.0 Related Policy Documents and Supporting Documents**

Legislation                        [Higher Education Standards Framework \(Threshold Standards\) 2021](#)

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Policy                                [Higher Degree by Research Policy](#)

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Procedures                        [Higher Degree by Research Examination Procedure](#)  
[Higher Degree by Research Supervision Procedure](#)

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