APPOINTMENT OF EXAMINERS – GUIDELINES

The nomination and appointment of examiners is based on the principle that higher degree by research (HDR) candidates should receive an impartial examination by high quality examiners in the field of research. The purpose of these guidelines is to ensure the robust and transparent appointment process, recognising that this is a key step in the quality assurance of HDR thesis examination.

Examiners of HDR theses are appointed by the Research Advisory Committee (RAC), following advice and information provided by Faculties. Supervisors are asked to nominate potential examiners as outlined below (Supervisor’s Role & Responsibilities). The RAC appoints three examiners for a doctoral thesis, at least two of whom shall be external to the University. For a research professional doctoral thesis or portfolio, one of these examiners may be an industry-based examiner. The RAC appoints two examiners for a masters thesis, at least one of whom shall be external to the University.


Identifying Potential Examiners

A key objective in this process is to appoint examiners who are authoritative in their field and whose assessment will be nationally and internationally respected. This is to the advantage of both the student and the University, preserving the value of the award and bringing the work of the HDR candidate to the attention of the scholarly community.

Early discussion between the HDR candidate and supervisor should seek to identify researchers with expertise in the field who could provide a fair and balanced assessment of the work. Candidates are also encouraged to state who they would not want as an examiner, for example where they are known to have strongly opposing views, methodologies and/or practices.

Ideally, at least two examiners of a doctoral thesis and one examiner of a masters thesis will have previous HDR thesis examination experience.

Examiners with identified or perceived conflicts of interest should not be nominated. In the appointment of examiners, CSU applies the [Conflict of Interest Guidelines] that have been adopted by Universities Australia and the Council of Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies in Australia.

Potential examiners who should be excluded (or decline to examine) include those:

- who have had substantial direct involvement in the candidate’s work;
- who believe they are likely to fail the thesis on the basis of the research paradigm or methodology;
- who have supervised this or another thesis by the candidate;
- who are close working colleagues of the candidate;
- who have co-authored a paper with the candidate; or
- whose own work is the focus of the research project.

Where the candidate is also a staff member of the University (or has a close association with it), it is strongly recommended that all examiners be external to the university.
Before accepting a thesis for examination, examiners will be asked to declare that they have no conflict of interest with the candidate, supervisor, or project.

Appointment Process
Two months’ notice of thesis submission is required, at which time the title of the thesis is confirmed and the recommendations for the appointment of examiners should be finalised by the supervisor(s).

The student completes the [Notification of Readiness to Submit Thesis] form and forwards to his/her Principle Supervisor. The Principle Supervisor contacts potential examiners before completing the nomination details on the [Appointment of Examiners] form and forwarding to the Sub Dean or Associate Dean responsible for HDR students in the Faculty.

If the Sub Dean or Associate Dean agrees that the examiners meet all requirements and should be recommended to the RAC for appointment, the Sub Dean or Associate Dean endorses the form and forwards to the Research Office. If they do not agree, the supervisors are asked to nominate other examiners.

The Research Office facilitates consideration/approval of the nominations by the RAC (or nominee). Following approval of the Appointment of Examiners and the thesis submission, the Research Office then coordinates the examination process.

Supervisor’s Role & Responsibilities in the Process
The supervisor provides recommendations of potential examiners for Faculty endorsement and RAC approval. Before doing so they should consult with the student who may make suggestions and indicate preferences. However, students should not be told the names of the examiners who have been nominated. This information remains confidential until the examiners reports are returned.

Justification of the selection of potential examiners must be provided. This justification should be provided in terms of the person’s position, research record, qualifications, experience etc. and brief supporting evidence (such as a brief CV) must be attached to support Faculty endorsement and RAC approval of each nomination.

During the nomination process, it is expected that the Principle Supervisor has

- discussed potential examiners with the candidate, as above
- read and applied the [Conflict of Interest Guidelines]
- contacted the proposed examiners to
  - advise of the dissertation topic and the degree for which it is submitted;
  - advise of the approximate size and scope of the thesis;
  - make them aware of the anticipated submission date and that their examination report would be required within 8 weeks;
  - ascertain their willingness and availability to examine the thesis.
- completed and signed the [Appointment of Examiners form] making sure all the relevant information is supplied before submitting to the Faculty for consideration and endorsement.

If a supervisor has difficulty with these requirements, s/he should seek feedback from the Sub Dean or Associate Dean responsible for HDR students in their Faculty.

Payment of Honorarium
A small honorarium is paid to external examiners. CSU applies honorarium rates as recommended and periodically reviewed by Universities Australia.