

## Guidelines for the Appointment of Examiners of Doctoral Theses and Masters Research Theses/Portfolios (of 90 points or more)

These guidelines are provided to promote independence and avoid any substantive conflict of interest (or perception of conflict of interest) between parties involved in thesis and research portfolio examinations. The aim of these guidelines is to protect all involved in the examination process against potential negative perceptions; there is no implication that any individual would behave other than appropriately. Those recommending appointments should be familiar with The University's policy regarding conflicts of interest:

<https://policies.auckland.ac.nz/policy-display-register/conflict-of-interest-policy.pdf>.

Candidates must not be involved in the selection of examiners or members of an Examination Committee and will not be advised of the identity of the nominees. The PhD Statute allows that, if the candidate has reason to believe that any person would be unsuitable to serve as an examiner on the grounds of conflict of interest, the candidate should submit the name of that person and a written statement as to the nature of the conflict of interest to the Graduate Centre at the time they give notice of their intention to submit. For doctoral degrees, the identity of the Oral Examiner will only become known to the candidate when the oral examination has been approved. Masters students are not advised of the identity of their examiners at any stage.

### Examiners

Recommendations for examiners should be made with a view to ensuring that the examination process is rigorous, fair, impartial and timely. The independence of examiners is critical to the quality of the examination process.

It is expected that examiners would normally be academics associated with an institution of appropriate standing and with substantial recent research experience. For some degrees, however, the appointment of recognised professional practitioners may be appropriate. The frequent use of any particular external examiner by a School or Department should not occur for the examination of doctoral theses.

All examiners should:

- Be expert in the topic and/or methodology of the thesis and be sufficiently experienced to evaluate whether or not the thesis fulfils the requirements for the degree.
- Normally hold a degree at least at the same level as the thesis under examination. For some degrees, the examiner may have equivalent research expertise but not hold a degree at the same level. In such cases the examiner's experience in research degree supervision and examination should be taken into consideration.
- Normally be research active. For some masters degrees the examiner may be active in an appropriate profession but not directly in research.

Examiners of doctoral theses and external examiners of research masters theses/portfolios (of  $\geq 90$  points) must not:

- Have been involved in the supervision of the candidate as a supervisor, co-supervisor or adviser.
- Be, or have been, involved in any research collaboration with the candidate or provision of advice to the candidate beyond the "minor consultative role on some aspect of the candidate's research" permitted (Guideline 38, PhD Statute).
- Be currently enrolled in a degree in the same subject and at the same level as that being examined.
- Currently hold any appointment, paid or honorary, at The University of Auckland or have held such an appointment during the candidate's enrolment in the degree under examination (other than thesis examination).
- Have any current or previous familial or personal relationship with either the candidate or members of their supervisory team.

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Examiners of doctoral theses and external examiners of masters theses/research portfolios (of  $\geq 90$  points) will not normally<sup>1</sup>:

- Have been employed by the institution at which the candidate completed their qualifying degree, in the same or a related discipline and at the time when the candidate was studying for their qualification.
- Be, or have been, involved in any substantial research collaboration with any of the candidate's supervisory team within the last 5 years.
- Be a graduate of The University of Auckland in the same or a related discipline unless the examiner's degree studies at Auckland were completed prior to the candidate's enrolment for the degree under examination.

Further examples of potential conflicts of interest are given in Appendix 1.

### Examination Committees

#### 1. Doctoral candidates

The PhD Statute (Clause 9e) states that 'No member of the Examination Committee may be a supervisor or have been involved in either the thesis research or preparation of the thesis. The Associate Dean will normally be from the same faculty as the candidate, but if that person is in the same department as the candidate then an Associate Dean from another Faculty should be substituted.'

Members of the Examination Committee should not have a personal or business relationship with the candidate or a close personal relationship with a member of the candidate's supervisory team or with an examiner.

#### 2. Masters candidates

Members of the Examination Committee for a Masters thesis or research portfolio should not have a personal or business relationship with the candidate or a close personal relationship with a member of the candidate's supervisory team nor should they have been involved directly in the research or supervision of the candidate.

### Chair of the Oral Examination

Clause 9m(iii) of the PhD Statute states that the Chair of the Oral Examination may not be a member of the Faculty in which the candidate is registered. The Chair should not have a personal relationship with the candidate or a member of their supervisory team nor should they have been involved with the research or supervision of the candidate.

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<sup>1</sup> Exceptions may apply in individual cases where there is clearly no conflict of interest. Please note that this list is not exhaustive and that there may be further situations in which a conflict of interest would preclude a proposed examiner being appointed.

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## Appendix 1: Conflicts of interest

Listed below are different types of conflict of interest that may arise. This list is indicative and should not be considered to be exhaustive. Some potential conflicts are of a lesser nature (marked \*) and should be declared but may not preclude appointment.

### 1. Personal, legal, professional and social conflicts

- Examiner is a relative, friend, associate or mentor of the candidate, or a relative or close friend of a member of the supervisory team
- Member of the Examination Committee or Chair of the Oral Examination is a relative of the candidate or a member of the supervisory team
- Examiner or member of the Examination Committee or Chair of the Oral Examination has an existing or previous personal or legal relationship (i.e. marriage, de-facto, civil union, co-resident, common household, legal family, guardian or dependent) with the candidate or a member of their supervisory team
- \*Examiner or member of the Examination Committee or Chair of the Oral Examination has, or has had, a professional, business or social relationship with the candidate
- \*Examiner has, or has had, a business relationship with a member of the supervisory team.

### 2. Conflict in working relationship between external examiner and candidate

- Examiner has been involved in the supervision of the candidate as supervisor, co-supervisor or advisor
- Examiner is, or has been, involved in any research collaboration with the candidate or provision of advice to the candidate beyond the 'minor consultative role on some aspect of the candidate's research' permitted (Guideline 38, PhD Statute).
- Examiner has employed the candidate or been employed by the candidate, or is in negotiation to employ or be employed by the candidate, or has acted as a referee for the candidate.
- \*Examiner has been employed by the institution at which the candidate completed their qualifying degree, in the same or a related discipline and at the time the candidate was studying for their qualification.

### 3. Conflict in working relationship between examiner and supervisory team

- Examiner was a candidate of a member of the supervisory team within the last 5 years
- Examiner has co-supervised with a member of the supervisory team within the last 5 years
- Examiner is or has been involved in substantial research collaboration with a member of the supervisory team within the last 5 years
- Examiner had directly employed or been employed by a member of the supervisory team within the last 5 years or is in negotiation to directly employ or be employed by a member of the supervisory team.

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### 4. Conflict of external examiner with the University

- Examiner is currently in negotiation with the University regarding a work contract (other than thesis examination)
- Examiner currently holds an appointment, paid or honorary, at The University of Auckland or has held such an appointment during the candidate's enrolment in the degree under examination (other than thesis examination)
- Examiner has graduated from the University of Auckland in the last 5 years
- Examiner has/had a formal grievance with the University of Auckland.

### 5. Conflict with examiner over subject matter

- Examiner has a direct commercial interest in the outcome of the research.

### 6. Conflict between examiners

- Examiner works in the same institution as another examiner
- Examiner is married to, or is closely related to, or has a close personal relationship with another examiner.