The examination of the thesis is a vital part of the higher degree program. Thesis examination at UNSW aligns with the Australian Graduate Research Good Practice Principles. It is important that the thesis is examined independently and the process is free from actual or perceived bias or preferential treatment. To achieve this, it is critical that members of the academic staff avoid nominating examiners with a perceived or actual conflict of interest (CoI).

It is important to note that:

- The conflict of interest can exist in fact or in perception.
- The aim of the conflict of interest guidelines is to protect the candidate, examiner and the university against potential negative perceptions during the thesis examination process.
- A CoI may be with the institution, the supervisor(s), other examiners, or the candidate.
- The supervisor or the PGC cannot make a determination of a conflict of interest. They must declare any issues so that an independent determination can be made.
- The existence of a conflict of interest does not automatically preclude a nominee being approved as a thesis examiner. When nominating a potential examiner with a possible conflict of interest, it is vital that full details are provided so that the evaluator can make a considered decision.
- Not declaring a CoI can have severe consequences as subsequent identification of the issue could lead to invalidation of the examination report and a replacement examiner having to be appointed.

The evaluation of CoI is carried out at the Faculty level by the Associate Dean Research Training/Director of Postgraduate Research/HDC Executive or HDC (as appropriate).

For cases where a CoI is identified and approved, the form will be checked by the Deputy Dean of Graduate Research to ensure that the evaluation has been carried out appropriately, that sufficient detail has been provided to allow a decision to be made, and UNSW’s policy has been followed.

To avoid conflicts of interest the following list will assist in managing the selection of thesis examiners. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list and all COIs not mentioned here must be declared and discussed.
Relationships that would normally exclude a potential examiner include:

**Working:**
- Examiner has co-authored a paper with the candidate or supervisors within the last 5 years
- Examiner holds a current grant with a supervisor
- Examiner holds a patent with a supervisor granted no more than 8 years ago and which is still in force
- Examiner must not have been an employee of the University within the past 5 years
- Examiner has directly employed or been employed by a supervisor or the candidate within the past 5 years
- Examiner is in negotiation to directly employ or be employed by the candidate, supervisors or UNSW
- Examiner was a PhD candidate with one of the supervisors within the past 5 years
- Examiner has worked with the candidate on matters regarding the thesis (e.g. previous member of the supervisory team)
- Examiner has acted as referee for the candidate or supervisor for employment
- Examiner has co-supervised with a supervisor in the past five years

**Personal/Legal:**
- Examiner is legally family or known relative to either a supervisor or the candidate or is a legal guardian or has power of attorney for either a supervisor or the candidate

**Business/Professional:**
- Examiner is currently in or has had a business relationship with the candidate or a supervisor in the last 5 years (for example, partner in a business or employment)
- Examiner has a direct commercial interest in the outcomes of the research
- Examiners has a current professional relationship, such as shared membership of a Board or Committee (including editorial and grant decision boards), with a supervisor

**Other:**
- Examiner has a formal grievance with UNSW
- Examiner is a current academic member of staff at UNSW or has a current Honorary, Adjunct or Emeritus position or is a Conjoint Title holder with UNSW
- Examiners working for the same institution or having a personal or business relationship with each other

The University of Western Australia has developed a list of detailed COIs, and the impact of such conflicts, which can also be used to provide further guidance in COI issues

Examples of examiner conflict of interest from UWA website

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1 “Supervisor” means anyone involved with the candidate in a supervisory capacity such as a joint, secondary supervisor, or other advisor.