

Appointment of Doctoral Examiners

Summary

When appointing examiners for a doctoral student there are regulations and processes that need to be followed in order to facilitate a smooth and successful examination. This protocol outlines the timeframe, nomination process and approval process required for appointing doctoral examiners.

Purpose

This protocol outlines the requirements for appointing examiners for a doctoral student.

Scope

This protocol is to be used when appointing doctoral examiners.

Application

Timeframes

An appointment of examiners form should normally be provided three months prior to submission for examination.

Students and supervisors should be aware of the timeframes for the examination process and any special considerations/requirements. For example: theses in Te Reo – Refer to Protocol: *Theses and Dissertations submitted in te reo Māori*; or, exhibition dates that are required to be organised in such a way to align with the proposed date of exegesis lodgement - refer to Protocol: *Practice-Oriented Examinations Protocol*.

A formal invitation to examine from the Graduate Research School (GRS) takes place prior to the thesis being submitted and with sufficient time to call on reserve examiners, or to arrange new examiners if the original nominees are unable to undertake the role (this process may vary for creative or practice-oriented examinations).

In the event of a delay of more than six months in the lodgement of the thesis for examination, the GRS will reconfirm the examiners' availability and also notify the examiners of the delay.

Nominations

Students may indicate the name of any person whom they believe should not be appointed as an examiner, giving reasons. Students may also initiate a discussion with the primary supervisor/co-supervisor (admin lead), or Faculty Associate Dean (Postgraduate) (ADP) as to a range of possible examiners. The overall process should not result in the student being given the name of the final recommended examiners.

Examiners are nominated by the primary supervisor/co-supervisor (admin lead), in consultation with the supervisory team, and they should be informally approached regarding ability, experience and willingness to examine. They should also discuss potential examination timeframes and availability for participation in the oral examination.

Examination Panel Composition

Normally, the examination panel should consist of two examiners; one New Zealand examiner and one international examiner. Both examiners may be international if a suitable New Zealand examiner is not available.

Please note: this may not apply to examinations in Te Reo; please refer to Protocol: *Thesis and dissertations submitted in te reo Māori*.

An external examiner is defined as a person who is not employed as a member of staff at AUT at the time when invited to examine the thesis. Previous staff members will be considered internal for three years after they cease working at AUT and will not be able to examine doctoral theses during this period.

While a reserve examiner is not required; a reserve examiner should be considered. This can shorten delays where an original examiner becomes unable to participate at any stage of the examination or an additional examiner is required. The reserve examiner must also be external. The reserve examiner should also be informally approached to take part in the examination where required. The GRS will send a formal invitation.

Experience of Examiners

When appointing examiners to doctoral examinations faculties should normally be appointing at least one experienced examiner. Experience is quantified as an examiner having previously examined a minimum of two doctoral students. All examiners should normally have expertise in the discipline and/or methodology and have international standing. Examiners must provide evidence of their expertise and relevant experience by providing a brief CV to the Faculty.

Mentors

A mentor examiner should be appointed by the faculty to guide first-time examiners (either internal or external) through the process. The examination is a confidential process and the mentor should not read the thesis, or act as an examiner.

Conflict of Interest

Refer to the *Conflict of Interest Protocol* on the AUT website. A conflict of interest is any situation where an examiner has an interest that conflicts, might conflict, or might be perceived to conflict with the interests of the student or supervisory team in running a fair, impartial and effective examination process. While the conflict of interest itself is unlikely to be improper, it could lead to improper conduct or allegations of such conduct if not declared and managed appropriately.

In determining whether a conflict is present or not, there are two questions to ask:

- Could a fair-minded reasonably informed observer have a reasonable apprehension that the examiner's professional judgement would be compromised in examining the student's thesis?
- Does the interest create an incentive for the examiner to act in a way that would be contrary to the objectives of a fair, impartial and effective examination process?

If the answer to either of these questions is 'yes', then a conflict exists.

Supervisors have a responsibility to ensure that there is no conflict of interest between the student, supervisors and the examiners. It is important that the supervisor identifies any potential or perceived conflicts of interest and declares these to the Faculty Postgraduate Committee. It may be possible for an examiner with a declared conflict of interest to be able to undertake the examination. However, this is at the discretion of the Faculty Postgraduate Committee. There are several points at which a Conflict of Interest can be identified:

- 1) At the submission of the Appointment of Examiners form;
- 2) When the GRS contact the examiners to inform them who the student, supervisory team and research topic is, and is asked if there is a conflict of Interest.

If a supervisor is unclear as to whether a potential conflict of interest exists, they must disclose the matter to the Associate Dean (Postgraduate).

Managing a Conflict of Interest

The nature of any action(s) to be undertaken by a supervisor will depend on the extent of the conflict of interest. The details of the conflict of interest, along with details on how the conflict will be handled in a transparent manner are

to be submitted to the GRS. The conflict of interest will be managed prior to examination in line with AUT's Conflict of Interest Policy.

Approval Process

The recommended examiners need to be submitted to the Faculty Postgraduate Committee and once approved forwarded to the GRS who will check that the examiners examination experience has been confirmed by the Faculty and report to the University Postgraduate Research Board (UPRB). Once approved, the GRS will formally invite the examiners to confirm their willingness to act in this role and their ability to provide a report within the specified timeframe (usually eight weeks from receipt of the thesis).

Examination Pack

Copies of the thesis/exegesis will be dispatched to the examiners by the GRS. The written reports from each examiner will be returned to the GRS before any discussions or dissemination of the reports takes place. The examiners are given a copy of the AUT University's briefing pack for examiners and informed of the date their reports are due.

Examiners are advised that their identity will be disclosed to the student and primary supervisor/co-supervisor (admin lead) prior to the oral examination.

Outcome

The appointment of appropriate examiners for the examination process in a timely manner.

Review

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