

Frequently Asked Questions to support the Implementation of the External Interests declaration system for Higher Degree by Research students

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1. What is meant by “external” in “external interest”? Does it only mean outside the University?

By “external” we mean outside the HDR student candidature. This could be activities or relationships to people within the University or elsewhere.

The relationships and activities which need to be declared are more fully explained in the [HDR Student Declaration of External Interests form](#).

2. Why do I have to disclose my relationships with professional bodies and other organisations which could be considered broadly relevant to the conduct or reporting of my research, even if I am not receiving any payment from them for my activities?

The potential for conflict of interests and bias exists when professional judgment concerning a primary interest (such as the validity of research) may be influenced by a secondary interest (such as financial gain or benefits of a non-financial nature to another person or organisation, or reluctance to cause detriment to another person or organisation with whom the researcher has a relationship). This can be the case even when an individual is a volunteer or unpaid adviser. Transparency in declaration of interests and relationships enables conflicts to be identified early and managed appropriately.

3. What is a material conflict of interest?

An interest will only be material if:

(a) it is real and substantial, not theoretical, remote, contingent or otherwise insubstantial; and

(b) it has, or appears to have, the capacity to influence the conduct of a particular individual (whether or not it has actually done so).

4. I am a HDR student, as well as a part time tutor. Could I use this system to declare all my external interests within this system?

Unfortunately, no. The DEI system for HDR students is designed for HDR students to declare their external interests in the context of their role as a research student. The University has a

separate system for staff and affiliates to declare external interests, as well as gifts and outside earnings for ongoing staff members. If you fall into both categories you will need to make separate declarations in relation to each of your student and staff capacities.

The Link to the staff system is [here](#).

5. I heard that I will have to disclose my personal relationships, including my friends and sexual partners. Is that correct?

The declaration form asks you to disclose personal relationships relevant to your HDR candidature or research. Examples of personal relationships include family members, close friends, a de facto partner, sexual partner, ex-partner, business partner or financial dependant. However, these would only need to be disclosed if they are relevant to your HDR activities, responsibilities, decision-making or research.

6. I am a Conservatorium student. Do I need to declare every single gig or freelance work I have been engaged in?

HDR students are asked to declare personal, financial or non-financial interests and relationships which could be considered broadly relevant to the conduct or reporting of their research so that it can be determined whether they could result in an actual, potential or perceived conflict of interests in relation to their HDR candidature or research.

If a one-off gig or item of freelance work is broadly relevant to the conduct or reporting of your research, it should be declared.

If there is an ongoing relationship with a person, association, company etc which is broadly relevant to the conduct or reporting of your research, this should be declared.

7. How often do I need to declare my external interests?

The University will initiate a mandatory declaration process around April/May each year.

However, if you have any new activities or relationships that should be declared prior to the next round of declarations, you can do so via a self-initiated declaration by [clicking this link](#).

8. Would I need to re-list all my external interests each year?

Your previously approved declared items will be carried through to the next declaration round.

You can modify or delete previously approved items or extend the approved items.

9. Where will my declaration records be kept and who has access?

The information in your declaration will be used by the University in accordance with the [Privacy Policy](#), [Recordkeeping Policy](#) and [External Interests Policy](#). Your declaration will be forwarded to your Lead Supervisor for assessment and the development of a management plan where a conflict of interests is identified.

It will also be provided to the Associate Dean (Research Education) and Postgraduate Coordinator where this is required and the Dean and/or Head of School may also be contacted in the assessment of the declaration and/or development of the management plan where this is needed.

A copy of your declaration and any management plan will be provided to the General Counsel for inclusion in the University's conflict of interests register where required. Persons with grounds to inspect the conflicts of interests register will be permitted access to the conflict of interests register at the discretion of the General Counsel.

10. I am not sure if a relationship needs to be disclosed as part of this process, whom I can contact for guidance?

Your supervision team is your first port of call, you can also reach out to your PGC.

11. What happens if I do not disclose a conflict of interest of which I become aware?

The requirement to disclose any relevant activity or relationship as soon as it becomes apparent is a policy requirement of the University. Failure to comply with this policy will be treated the same as any other policy breach. It could amount to misconduct and result in disciplinary proceedings.

12. I think I have a conflict of interests, what should I do?

Students must:

- a. provide a written declaration of the relevant activity or relationship to the lead supervisor as soon as possible after you become aware of it, in the form provided for that purpose; and
- b. develop an appropriate conflict management plan with your lead supervisor where a conflict is identified.

13. Where can I find the conflict management plan?

A template conflict management plan is available [here](#). If you have any questions in relation to the completion of the plan, please consult with your lead supervisor.

14. Where can I find the *Higher Degree by Research Supervision Policy 2020, Progress Planning and Review for Higher Degree by Research Students Policy 2015, and Research Code of Conduct 2019*?

All University policies are available on open access in the University's [Policy Register](#).

The following links will take you directly to some of the relevant policy documents.

[Higher Degree by Research Supervision Policy 2020](#)

[Progress Planning and Review for Higher Degree by Research Students Policy 2015](#)

[Research Code of Conduct 2019](#)

15. Other useful documents include:

[Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2018](#)

[Disclosure of interests and management of conflicts of interest: A guide supporting the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2019](#)