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1. Introduction

This guide provides NHMRC Assigners Academy members with step-by-step instructions for declaring Conflicts of Interest (CoIs) and suitability, identifying external assessors, monitoring their progress and securing assessments using NHMRC’s Research Grants Management System (RGMS).

This document should be read in conjunction with the current *Guide to NHMRC Peer Review* and the *Project Grants scheme-specific peer review guidelines*, available on the [NHMRC website](https://www.nhmrc.gov.au).

1.1. Support

Further information and assistance with Assigner processes is available from the Assigners Academy team via email or from NHMRC’s Research Help Centre (RHC) by phone between 9am and 5pm AEST/AEDT Monday to Friday.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Email</th>
<th><a href="mailto:academy@nhmrc.gov.au">academy@nhmrc.gov.au</a></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>1800 500 983 (or +61 2 6217 9451 for international callers)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Getting Started

2.1. Assigners Area in RGMS

Links to Assigner functions, information and help in RGMS are grouped on the Assigners tab.

1. From the RGMS Home page, select the Assigners tab.

2. Navigate to the Quicklinks for Assigners or Information and Help section and select the appropriate link.

![Assigners Tab Overview](image.jpg)

2.2. Downloading Application Documents

Application documents are made available to Assigners for declaring CoIs and Assigner suitability and identifying external assessors. These can be downloaded as a zip file via one of two methods:

i) by manually generating a download link following the instructions below; or

ii) by clicking on the RGMS-generated download link sent to you via email (note: if you did not receive a link via email, you will need to use the manual method).

**IMPORTANT NOTE:**
You will require a zip file expander program, such as WinZip or Peazip (PC) or StuffIt Expander (Mac), to extract individual application documents from the zip file.
1. From the RGMS Home page, select the Assigners tab.

2. Navigate to the Quicklinks for Assigners section and select Review application documents.

3. The Download Documents List page will open. At the bottom of the display, select New Download Documents.

4. The Create Download Documents page will open. Complete the following steps:
   
a. In the Round field, enter an asterisk followed by either the current year (e.g. *2018) or scheme name (e.g. *project grant) and choose the appropriate funding round from the auto lookup. Alternatively, by selecting the Browse icon, you can Show All available choices. Then select the appropriate round and press Add.
   
b. From the Document Type drop-down menu, select Application Documents – Assigner.
   
c. Select Save.

5. The Download Documents: download - Properties page will open. Hover over the Properties drop-down menu and select Documents – Assigner.
6. A new screen will open on the same page. Complete the following steps:

   a. Begin typing your last name in the **Name** field and choose an option from the auto lookup. Alternatively, select the **Browse** icon, enter your last name and select **Filter**. Then select your name and press **Add**.

   b. Use the **Download Purpose** drop-down menu to select one of the following:

      i. **Determine CoI** – This selection provides application summaries, including team information. Select this option if you want to declare CoIs and Assigner suitability.

      ii. **Allocate Assessors** – This selection provides the full documentation for each application assigned to you. Select this option if you have been notified of your allocated applications and wish to identify potential external assessors.

   c. Enter a password in the **Password** field, noting that: (i) it must be no more than 20 characters in length; and (ii) you will need to remember the password to open the downloaded zip file.

   d. Select **Yes** from the **Generate Zip File** drop-down menu.

   e. Select **Save** and wait for approximately one minute. This gives the zip file time to assemble.

7. Refresh the page (F5 for PC or ⌘+R for Mac). A hyperlink will appear in the **URL** field. Initiate the download process by selecting the hyperlink. You will have 120 hours (five days) to download the zip file via the hyperlink, after which you will have to generate a new link (go back to step 1).

   a. When prompted, save the zip file to your computer.

   b. If the hyperlink does not appear, an error message appears (e.g. Status 404 Error) or nothing happens when you select the hyperlink, close the error message, wait 2-5 minutes, refresh the page and re-select the hyperlink.

8. Open the zip file on your computer using a zip file expander program, such as WinZip or Peazip (for PC) or StuffIt Expander (for Mac). You will be required to enter the password created in Step 6c to open the files.
9. Extract the application documents to a folder on your computer. This will save you having to open the zip file and enter the password each time you wish to access the documents.

   a. The extracted files will include a csv file titled “AAA_<Assigner Name>” that lists the CIA name and application ID of all the application documents that have been downloaded.

2.3. Declaring Conflicts of Interest (CoIs) and Assigner Suitability

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Scroll to the bottom of the page and save your work frequently. Always save before moving between pages in RGMS. RGMS times out after 30 minutes of inactivity and does not recognise typing as an activity. If RGMS times out or if you change pages without saving, you will lose any unsaved data.

1. From the RGMS **Home** page select the **Assigners** tab.

2. Navigate to the **Quicklinks for Assigners** section and select **Declare conflicts of interest**.

3. From the **Round** field, use the browse icon to open the **Assigner Rounds** screen and select the appropriate round (e.g. 2018_Project Grant_funding_commencing_2019).

4. Select **Add**.

5. Ensure the **Assigned** filter is set to **All**.

6. Select **Filter**.

7. For each application listed, use the application summary you downloaded in **Section 2.2** and the guidance table on the following page of this guide to determine if you have a potential CoI.
These tables are intended to be for guidance only. They are representative of COI situations rather than definitive, as each situation is different and needs to be considered on its merits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Explanations and examples</th>
<th>Conflict level*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Application under review</td>
<td>You are a named participant on the application under review.</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You have had discussions/input into the study design or research proposal of this application.</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborations</td>
<td>You have actively collaborated re publications (co-authorship), pending applications, existing NHMRC or other grants.</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You have an indirect collaboration e.g. collaborating co-worker, member of a research or discussion group, co-author of a large multi-author paper where involvement was minimal, provided cells/animals etc. to applicants without financial gain or exchange.</td>
<td>Obtain a ruling from NHMRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You are planning, or have been approached to be involved in a future grant application or other future collaborative relationship with this applicant(s).</td>
<td>Obtain a ruling from NHMRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working relationship</td>
<td>Please refer to Additional Guidance table below.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional relationships and interests</td>
<td>Please refer to Additional Guidance table below.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social relationship and/or interests</td>
<td>There is a personal/social relationship between you, your partner or other member of your family and the applicant.</td>
<td>Usually High, may need a ruling from NHMRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You have a personal/social relationship with the applicant’s partner or other member of their family.</td>
<td>Usually High, may need a ruling from NHMRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situation</td>
<td>Explanations and examples</td>
<td>Conflict level*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching or supervisory relationship</strong></td>
<td>For either undergraduate or postgraduate studies, you have taught or supervised the applicant; you co-supervised the applicant; your own research was supervised by the applicant.</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial interest in the application</strong></td>
<td>You have an associated patent pending; supply goods and services; improved access to facilities; provide cells/animals or similar to the applicant.</td>
<td>Usually High, may need a ruling from NHMRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You receive research funding or other support from a company and the research to be reviewed may impact upon the company.</td>
<td>Usually High, may need a ruling from NHMRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other interests or situations</strong></td>
<td>You have a previous or pending dispute (may require consideration of events earlier than the last five years).</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicative only. Experienced NHMRC staff will exercise judgement when deciding the level of conflict and, in doing so, will consider the particular circumstance of each potential conflict.

---

### Additional Guidance for Work and Professional COI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Explanations and examples</th>
<th>Conflict level*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Working Relationship</strong></td>
<td>You have the same employer or are part of the same organisation.</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Where an assessor and an applicant work at the same independent Medical Research Institute (e.g. Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute, The Garvan Institute of Medical Research etc.) or in the same University/Hospital Department.</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Where an assessor or applicant holds a position of influence within an organisation, or has a pecuniary interest, e.g. Dean of Faculty or School/Institute Directors.</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Where an assessor and an applicant work for the same institution but at different campuses and do not know each other.</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Where an assessor and an applicant work in the same faculty but in different schools/departments and do not know each other.</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional relationships and interests</td>
<td>You are working in the same department (or equivalent) within an organisation</td>
<td>High - in most situations due to perceived CoI relating to potential financial benefit from showing favour towards application, and the likelihood that the assessor and applicant know each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You work in the same locality but for a different organisation, i.e. Where an assessor works for a University and an applicant works for an affiliated Medical Research Institute (or vice versa), such as relationships between:</td>
<td>When there is a direct association/collaboration between the assessor and applicant, where the assessor may have or may be perceived to have a vested interest in this research.</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The University of Melbourne and Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research (WEHI); or</td>
<td>Where two organisations are affiliated but there is no direct association/collaboration between the assessor and applicant (e.g. researchers located at the University of Melbourne faculty that has no direct association/collaboration with applicant at WEHI).</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The University of New South Wales and The George Institute for Global Health.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional relationships and interests</td>
<td>You are also a member of the same scientific advisory committee, review board, exam board, trial committee etc.</td>
<td>Where you hold a membership in which you may be perceived to have a vested interest, i.e. pecuniary or other direct interests with the proposed research, e.g. when another board/committee member is associated with the grant application (a member of the CI team or is Faculty/Department Head where the research is to be conducted.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>You are a member of the same advisory board or committee but otherwise have no links or association that would constitute a High ruling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You or your organisation are affiliated with the applicant's organisation, i.e. where an assessor and an applicant work for different organisations that have active/ongoing collaborations or affiliations, such as affiliations between: The University of Melbourne and Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research (WEHI), or The University of New South Wales and The George Institute for Global Health, or The Schools of Health Sciences at two or more different universities, as part of a research or teaching collaboration.</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where there is a direct link/collaboration between the applicant and assessor, in which the assessor may have or may be perceived to have a vested interest in this research.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where two organisations are affiliated but there is no direct association/collaboration between applicant and assessor (e.g. researcher located at the University of Melbourne and has no direct link/collaboration with individual at WEHI).</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You or your organisation is affiliated or associated with organisations such as pharmaceutical companies, tobacco companies etc.</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When you or your institution has an affiliation/association with the organisation(s) that may have or may be perceived to have vested interest in this research e.g. a pharmaceutical company that has provided drugs to the applicants for testing.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When you or your institution has an indirect affiliation/association with the organisation(s) that may have or may be perceived to have a vested interest in this research, e.g. you are employed at a large institution in an area distant from the organisation(s) in question.</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To declare your Conflict of Interest (CoI) level for an application, click within the CoI box and select from the following:

a. To declare no conflict – Leave the setting as [Select]. No further changes are required.

b. To request a ruling on a potential conflict – Use the drop down menu to select Ruling Required. Enter the details of the nature and extent to the potential CoI in the Note column. NHMRC will use this information to provide a ruling.

c. To declare a conflict – Use the drop down menu to select Yes and enter the details of the nature and extent to the potential CoI in the Note column.

Next, determine your Assigner Suitability for each application listed. Assigner Suitability reflects expertise and does not take potential CoIs into consideration. Please record your Assigner Suitability as if you have no CoI.

To indicate your suitability for an application, click within the Assigner Suitability column and select:

a. Yes (default setting) - This is within my area of expertise and I am confident I can identify external assessors to review this application.

b. Moderate - I work broadly within this research field and I can identify external assessors to review this application.

c. Limited - I have limited knowledge of this research field but I could act as an Assigner for this application if required.

d. No - This is outside my area of expertise and I do not feel that I could act as an Assigner for this application.

Once you have completed your CoI and Assigner Suitability declarations for each application, click into the Declaration Complete? box and select Yes.

Scroll to the bottom of the page and select Save. If your CoI declarations require more than one page in RGMS, always select Save prior to moving to another page. RGMS will not retain unsaved data when moving between pages.
2.4. Creating Assigner Email Stationery

RGMS uses email templates for sending and cancelling invitations to external assessors. These templates can be customised.

1. From the RGMS Home page, select the Assigners tab.

2. Navigate to the Quicklinks for Assigners section and select the Configure assessor invitation emails link.

3. The Profile and CV List page will open. Select the Properties icon to open the General - Properties page of your Profile and CV.

4. Hover over the Properties tab drop-down menu and select the Assigner link.

5. The Profile and CV: Assigner - Properties page will open. Complete the following steps:

   a. Ensure the Email address field is populated with the email address you wish to use for Academy-related correspondence (see ‘a’ in below image). By default, this field contains a full stop ‘.’.

   b. If you want copies of RGMS-generated emails sent to the email address entered in Step a, tick the CC addressee on emails you generate? Box (see ‘b’ in below image).
c. Enter your preferred salutation in the **Sign off and signature block** field (see 'c' in below image).

d. Select the **Initialise email address and text** check box at the bottom of the page, then select **Save** (see 'd' in below image).
   
   i. Refresh the page (F5 for PC or ⌘+R for Mac).
   
   ii. RGMS will insert default invitation and cancellation text into the relevant fields.

e. To preview an example of the emails, select the **Generate sample invitation email** or **Generate sample cancellation email** check boxes and select **Save** (see 'e' in below image). A sample email will be sent to the email address entered in Step a.

f. Select **Save** to save all changes and selections.

6. If you wish to customise the default text, you may do so by clicking into either the **Default invitation text** or **Default cancellation text** fields and using standard text editing techniques to change and then **Save** the text. However, NHMRC recommends that you retain the default text.

7. Should you wish to reset the text of your emails back to the RGMS default:

   a. Navigate to the **Profile and CV: Assigner - Properties** page, as described in Section 2.4.
   
   b. Uncheck the **Initialise email address and text** check box and select **Save**.
   
   c. Reselect the **Initialise email address and text** check box so that it is now checked and select **Save** again.

---

![Image showing the RGMS configuration page with text fields for email address, CC addresses, and sign off and signature block.](image-url)
2.5. Accessing Your Assigned Applications

Once you have submitted Col and Assigner suitability declarations (see Section 2.3) and NHMRC has ruled on any conflicts, applications are allocated to Academy members for identifying external assessors. These applications and associated tasks are accessed/initiated via two main pages:

- **Assignments – Assigners and Applications** – This page displays all the applications that have been assigned to you. Individual applications can be accessed from here.

- **Assigner Application – General Properties** – This page displays application-specific information. You can access most functions and tasks associated with a selected application from this page.

To access the **Assignments – Assigners and Applications** page and **Assigner Application – General Properties** pages:

1. From the RGMS Home page, select the **Assigners** tab.

2. Navigate to the **Quicklink for Assigners** section and select any of the following links: **Identify potential assessors**, **Assign applications to assessors**, or **Monitor and manage assigned applications**.

3. By default, RGMS filters for and displays the current Project Grants round. If RGMS does not display your applications when the page opens:
   a. Use the Browse icon to choose the correct funding scheme and select **Add**.
   b. Ensure the **Assigned** drop-down menu is set to **Yes**.
   c. Ensure the **Active Applications** drop-down menu is set to **Yes**.
   d. Select **Filter**.

4. From the list of applications, select either an application hyperlink or the **Properties** icon to open an application.
5. The Assigner Application – General Properties page will open. Hover over the Properties tab and select the Assignments link.

6. The Assigner Application – Assignments Properties page will open. It contains:
   a. Application, CI Publications, Ineligible Candidates, Candidates Based on Keyword Matches, Keyword Search, Assessments Approaching Overdue and Processes tabs (see ‘a’ in below image) – these link to additional functions and data (see Section 3).
   b. The application title – This includes the application number and CIA name for the application (see ‘b’ in below image).
   c. The status box – to refine your search results, click to deselect one or more statuses (see ‘c’ in below image).
   d. Table of current assignments - By default, all potential external assessors assigned to the application are displayed. The current status of each external assessor is indicated by a coloured arrow (see ‘d’ in below image):
      i. Assigned – an invitation has not yet been sent to this potential external assessor.
      ii. Pending – an invitation has been sent to this potential external assessor, but a decision has not yet been received.
      iii. Accepted – an invitation has been accepted by this potential external assessor.
      iv. Inactive – an invitation to this potential external assessor has been declined or cancelled.
   e. New, Delete and Return buttons – these allow you to add and remove potential external assessors and return to the Assigner Application List page (see ‘e’ in below image).

Note: RGMS allows a maximum of two active invitations (Pending/Accepted) at any one time.
3. Selecting External Assessors

3.1. Identifying Potential External Assessors

RGMS provides several resources to help you identify potential external assessors. Instructions for accessing these resources are outlined below.

3.1.1. Application Details

1. Navigate to the Assignments – Assigners and Applications page to view your applications. See Section 2.5 for more details.

2. To review details of a specific application, select the relevant application by clicking on the Application hyperlink or Properties icon.

3. The Assigner Application – General Properties page for that application will open. Select the Application tab to view application details including:
   a. Application Documentation – Select any of these hyperlinks to open/download the indicated document (see ‘a’ in below image).
   b. Application Team Members (see ‘b’ in below image)
   c. Nominated Possible Assessors (see ‘c’ in below image)
   d. Research Keywords (see ‘d’ in below image).
3.1.2. Chief Investigator (CI) Publications

This tab displays the publications for each CI on the application. Examining this list can help define the expertise required of external assessors. It can also help identify potential external assessors who may be conflicted due to their status as a co-author.

To view CI publications associated with an application:

1. From the Assigner Application – General Properties page, select the CI Publications tab.

   Individual publications are displayed for each CI on the application, including:
   - CI Role
   - CI Name
   - Year of publication
   - Type of publication
   - Title of the Article/Abstract/Chapter
   - Authors – Note: most recent co-authors (within five years) are automatically considered to have a high CoI and therefore cannot act as an external assessor
   - Title of the Journal/Conference/Book.

3.1.3. Ineligible Candidates

For each application, RGMS generates a list of individuals who cannot be approached to review that application. It is essential that you review this list prior to assigning potential external assessors.

1. From the Assigner Application – General Properties page, select the Ineligible Candidates tab. Ineligible candidates are displayed for the selected application.

2. If the list is large, use the Name filter to narrow your search. Enter an asterisk followed by the potential external assessor’s last name (i.e. *last name) to see if the name appears in the list.
3.1.4. Candidates Based on Keyword Matches

Each applicant should have identified keywords relevant to their proposed research project. The Candidates Based on Keyword Matches tab compares those keywords to those in the Profile and CV of all RGMS account holders. Any matches are displayed in this tab.

IMPORTANT NOTE
When selecting potential assessors, you must not approach RGMS account holders with “DO NOT CONTACT” next to their name. For all other candidates, you are still required to check the Ineligible Candidates tab to confirm whether they are eligible. See Section 3.1.3 for more details.

To identify candidates based on keyword matches:

1. From the Assigner Application – General Properties page, select the Candidates Based on Keyword Matches tab (see ‘1’ in below image).

2. In the Minimum Matches With Application field (see ‘2’ in below image), enter a number between 1 and 5 according to the number of keywords that you are seeking to match (Tip: to increase the number of results, try entering a lower number).

3. Selecting Filter (see ‘3’ in below image) will display the following information for each match:
   a. Name
   b. Institution/Keyword
   c. Email (press this icon to open a pre-addressed email)
   d. Phone number
   e. State
   f. Broad Research Area/Field of Research
   g. Number of Keyword Matches.

4. Select the ++ plus icon (see ‘4’ in below image) next to a Name to examine:
   a. which keywords associated with the application match those listed against that person
   b. the Field(s) of Research in which that person has worked or is working.
3.1.5. Keyword Search Tab

Similar to the Candidates Based on Keyword Matches tab (see Section 3.1.4), the Keyword Search tab compares RGMS account holder keywords to a custom list of keywords you create.

1. From the Assigner Application – General Properties page, select the Keyword Search tab.

2. The filters on this page are:
   
   a. **Keyword Name Contains** (see ‘a’ in image below), which is a free-text lookup field that allows you to search against a single keyword.
   
   b. The **Combine Partial and Full Keyword matches Using and/or drop-down menu** (see ‘b’ in image below).
   
   c. Six additional **Keyword** fields (see ‘c’ in image below), there are three on the left and three on the right.

   These filters allow you to perform complex searches by combining strings of keywords. For example, the search below filters for researchers who have the keywords 'gene' and 'RNA binding proteins' or 'RNA processing' and 'genetic engineering' listed in their RGMS profile.

3. Searches can be further refined by selecting a **Broad Research Area**, **Field of Research** and/or **State** from the fields indicated below:

4. Once all your search criteria have been entered, select **Filter** to display a list of matching researchers.
3.2. Assigning a Potential External Assessor to an Application

Regardless of the method used to identify a potential external assessor, they must first be assigned to an application before you can send them an invitation.

**IMPORTANT NOTE**
You can assign as many potential assessors to an application as you wish; however, RGMS allows a maximum of two active invitations (pending/accepted) per application at any given time.

### 3.2.1. Single Assignments

To assign a potential external assessor to an application:

1. Navigate to the **Assigner Application – General Properties** page for the application. See **Section 2.5** for more details.

2. From the **Properties** tab drop-down menu, select the **Assignments** link.

3. At the bottom-left of the display, select **New**.

4. The **Create Assignment** page will open. If the potential external assessor is based at an Australian institution and has an RGMS account, begin typing the candidate’s last name into the **Candidate** field and select the relevant name from the list that appears. Alternatively, use the Browse icon to search for and add the name of the potential external assessor.

5. If the potential external assessor is based at an Australian institution but does not have an RGMS profile, or is based at an overseas institution, enter the relevant details in the **Candidate Without RGMS Profile** section. It is essential that you enter an up-to-date email address.
6. To complete this process, select **Save And Return**. The potential external assessor can now be invited to review the application and will have a grey arrow against their name.

### 3.2.2. Multiple Assignments

A potential external assessor that you assign to one application may also be suitable to review other applications. Once an assessor has been assigned to one application (see Section 3.2.1), they can easily be assigned to others.

1. Navigate to the **Assigner Application – General Properties** page for any application to which the assessor has already been assigned. See Section 2.5 for more details.

2. From the **Properties** tab drop-down menu, select the **Copy Assignments** link.

3. Begin typing the last name of the assessor into the **Assignees/Candidates** field and select a name from the list that appears. Alternatively, use the Browse icon to display a list of all assessors currently assigned to that application.

4. To select the additional application/s to which you want the assessor’s name copied, begin typing an application number directly into the **Target Applications** field and select the application from the list that appears. Alternatively, use the Browse icon to display a list of all applications for which you are responsible as an Assigner.

5. Once you have made your selections in the **Assignees/Candidates** and **Target Applications** fields, change the **Create Assignment** drop-down menu to **Yes**.
6. To complete the process, select **Save** or **Save And Return**. The assessor(s) you selected are now assigned to the additional application(s).

7. For each application to which you have just assigned this assessor, check the **Ineligible Candidates** list to verify that they are eligible to provide an external assessment. See Section 3.1.3 for further details.
4. Managing External Assessor Invitations

Once a potential external assessor has been identified and assigned to an application (see Section 3), they can be invited to review the application.

**IMPORTANT NOTE**
The process described below applies only to potential external assessors based at Australian institutions. A different process applies to potential external assessors based at overseas institutions (OSEAs). See Section 4.4 for more details.

The invitation email sent by RGMS links to an online form where the invited external assessor can indicate their willingness to provide an assessment. They can choose from one of the following responses:

- **Yes** – you will receive an email informing you that the invitation has been accepted. The Assigner Application – Assignments Properties page will also update the external assessor’s invitation status to ‘accepted’ by displaying a green arrow. For more details on assessor status, see paragraph 6d, Section 2.5.

- **Yes (with potential Conflict of Interest)** – you will receive an email informing you that a CoI ruling is required. The email will contain a link that directs you to the Assigner Application – Assignments Properties page where you can view the details provided by the potential external assessor and enter a ruling. See Section 4.6 for more details.

- **No** – you will receive an email informing you that the invitation has been declined. The email will contain a link to the Assigner Application – Assignments Properties page where you can click on the potential external assessor’s name and view their reasons for declining, as well as the names of any alternative external assessors they have suggested.

4.1. Prior to Inviting a Potential External Assessor

Before you send an invitation to a potential external assessor, it is important to consider the following circumstances that will preclude them from providing an assessment:

- The candidate may have declared a period of unavailability.
- The candidate is participating on a Grant Review Panel (GRP).
- The candidate has already accepted the maximum number of invitations to provide an assessment.

To verify these points, complete the following:

1. Navigate to the Assigner Application – Assignments Properties page for the relevant application. See Section 2.5 for more details.

2. Select the icon in the Info column for the desired candidate.
3. The **Assignment Portlets: Personal Details** portlet will open. Select the **Commitments and Unavailability – This Year** tab, which displays:

   a. **Candidate Unavailability** (see ‘a’ in below image) – Dates that the candidate cannot participate in peer review.

   b. **Candidate Assigner Academy Membership** (see ‘b’ in below image) – ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ will be displayed. Note that Academy membership does not preclude a potential external assessor from providing an assessment.

   c. **Candidate Panel Membership** (see ‘c’ in below image) – Displays the current funding round/s for which the candidate is participating as a panel member.

   d. **Candidate External Assessments – Maximum of Six Accepted** (see ‘d’ in below image) – Indicates how many invitations the candidate has already accepted in the current funding round.

4.2. **Inviting a Potential External Assessor**

To invite a potential external assessor to review an application:

1. Navigate to the **Assigner Application – Assignments Properties** page for the relevant application. See Section 2.5 for more details.

2. Select the **Last Name** of the assessor to whom you wish to send an invitation.

3. Hover over the **Properties** tab drop-down menu and select **Invitation**.
4. The default invitation text you set up earlier (see Section 2.4) will appear in the Invitation field. If you wish, you can amend the default text by clicking in the Invitation field and using standard text editing techniques. Any changes made here will apply to this invitation only.

If no text appears in the Invitation field, your Assigner stationery has not been set up correctly. See Section 2.4 for more details.

5. Additional options available under the Actions banner include:

a. **Candidate is a Friend?** (see ‘a’ in below image) – By default, invitation greetings use the addressee’s title and last name. To use an alternative greeting, check this box and enter a substitute name in the Preferred Name field (e.g. entering ‘Bob’ will result in the greeting ‘Dear Bob’). This change applies to the current invitation only.

b. **Candidate Lives Overseas?** (see ‘b’ in below image) – This mandatory field determines the type of invitation generated by RGMS. Select either Yes (if the candidate is based at an overseas institution, see Section 4.4 for more details) or No (if the candidate is based at an Australian institution) from the drop-down menu.

c. **CIA Gave Consent For An Overseas Assessor?** (see ‘c’ in below image) - When submitting an application, applicants are asked whether they consent to their application(s) being reviewed by an OSEA. RGMS displays their response with either a green tick for Yes or a red cross for No. If consent has not been given, you must not assign the application to an OSEA.

d. **Candidate is Eligible?** (see ‘d’ in below image) – RGMS verifies the eligibility of each candidate against the Ineligible Candidates tab (see Section 3.1.3 for more details). If the selected candidate is not eligible to review this application, a red cross appears, which prevents RGMS from generating an invitation email. Otherwise, a green tick indicates the candidate is eligible. If ‘Calculating...’ is displayed, refresh the page (F5 for PC or ⌘+R for Mac).

e. **Send Invitation Email** (see ‘e’ in below image) – Select Yes from the drop-down menu to confirm that you are ready to send the invitation. You will not be able to select ‘Yes’ if you already have two active (pending/accepted) invitations against an application.

f. **Cancel Automatic Email Resend** (see ‘f’ in below image) – By default, RGMS resends the invitation email if there is no response within two days. If you wish to cancel this process, select Yes from the drop-down menu.
6. When you are satisfied with the invitation, select **Save** or **Save And Return**. RGMS will generate the invitation and send an email to the candidate.

4.3. Cancelling an Invitation

Assigners may cancel an invitation to an external assessor at any time (e.g. an invitation was sent to the wrong person, or the recipient has not replied). To do this:

1. Navigate to the **Assigner Application – General Properties** page for the relevant application. See Section 2.5 for more details.

2. From the **Properties** tab drop-down menu, select the **Assignments** link.

3. To cancel an invitation to a potential external assessor, select the assessor’s **Last Name**.

4. The **Assigner Application – Assignment Properties** page will open. Hover over the **Properties** tab drop-down menu and select **Invitation**.

5. The default cancellation text you set up earlier will appear in the **Cancellation** field (see Section 2.4 for more details). If you wish, you can amend the text by clicking in the **Cancellation** field and using standard text editing techniques. Any changes apply to this cancellation only.

If no text appears in the **Invitation** field, your Assigner stationery has not been set up correctly. See Section 2.4 for more details.
6. Select Yes from the Cancel Invitation drop-down menu.

7. Select Save or Save And Return. This will generate and send a cancellation email via RGMS. The arrow in the Status column for this invitee will change to blue →.

4.4. Coordinating Reviews by Overseas External Assessors (OSEAs)

**IMPORTANT NOTE:**
NHMRC encourages the submission of external assessments from assessors based at overseas institutions. Please note the following key differences in the process of securing external assessments from OSEAs:

- OSEAs should not utilise RGMS directly for responding to invitations, declaring COIs, or submitting assessments, and Academy members cannot do this on their behalf in RGMS. Please forward any email correspondence from OSEAs to nhmrc.overseasassessments@nhmrc.gov.au to assist NHMRC in co-ordinating these processes.
- It is important for NHMRC to be able to trace assessments contributed by assessors at overseas institutions, so please do not send invitations to OSEAs via an existing RGMS account.
- Under no circumstances should Academy members instruct OSEAs to open an account in RGMS.
- When submitting an application, applicants are asked whether they consent to their application being reviewed by an OSEA. RGMS displays their response in the CIA Gave Consent For An Overseas Assessor? field with either a green Yes or a red No (see Section 4.2 for more details). If consent has not been given, Assigners must not invite an OSEA to review the application.

Assessments by OSEAs are managed as follows:

1. Initiate an invitation as outlined in Section 4.2. At Step 5b, select Yes from the Candidate Lives Overseas? drop-down menu, then continue with the remaining steps to generate the invitation.

2. The invitation email generated by RGMS will instruct the OSEA to contact NHMRC directly with their response. If they accept, NHMRC will coordinate the rest of the assessment submission process.
4.5. Responding to an Invitation on behalf of an External Assessor

External assessors based within Australia occasionally contact Academy members outside RGMS with their response to an invitation. It is important that their decision is recorded in RGMS to allow them access to the application or to signal that an alternative assessor is required. Instructions for recording external assessors’ decisions in RGMS are outlined below.

1. Navigate to the **Assigner Application – General Properties** page for the relevant application. See Section 2.5 for details.

2. Hover over the **Properties** tab drop-down menu and select the **Assignments** link.

3. Select the external assessor’s **Last Name**.

4. The **Assigner Application – Assignment Properties** page will open. Select the appropriate response from the **Candidate’s Decision** drop-down menu:
   a. **Accepted (Assigner)** – If the external assessor accepted the invitation.
   b. **Decline (Assigner)** – If the external assessor declined the invitation.

5. If known, enter the candidate’s **Reason for Declining** and **Suggested Replacements** in the fields provided.

6. Select **Save** or **Save And Return** to register the candidate’s decision in RGMS.
4.6. External Assessor Conflicts of Interest (Cols)

All invited external assessors must declare potential Cols when accepting an invitation to provide an assessment. The Assigner will then receive an email from RGMS indicating that a ruling is required. The email contains a direct link to the Assigner Application – Assignment Properties page, where details of the potential Col can be viewed. The Assigner must evaluate the details provided and enter a ruling in RGMS. For guidance on what constitutes a Col, refer to Section 4.3. of the 2018 Guide to NHMRC Peer Review, available at https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/grants-funding/apply-funding/project-grants.

IMPORTANT NOTE
OSEAs should not utilise RGMS directly for responding to invitations, declaring COIs, or submitting assessments, and Academy members cannot do this on their behalf in RGMS. Please forward any email correspondence from OSEAs to nhmrc.overseasassessments@nhmrc.gov.au to assist NHMRC in co-ordinating these processes. Refer to Section 4.4 for more details.

To enter a Col ruling:

1. Click the hyperlink in the email. This takes you to the Assigner Application – Assignment Properties page in RGMS.

2. Hover over the Properties drop-down menu and select Conflict of Interest.

3. The Assigner Application – Conflict of Interest page will open. Complete the following steps:
   a. Review any comments in the Col Comments – Candidate field (see ‘a’ in below image).
   b. Enter your ruling in the Col Comments – Assigner/NHMRC field (see ‘b’ in below image).
   c. Select the appropriate conflict level (High, Low or None) from the Col Ruling drop-down menu (see ‘c’ in below image), using the matrix below as a guide.
   d. Select Save or Save And Return. This generates an email to the candidate with the results of the Col ruling.
5. Monitoring External Assessor Progress

Academy members can track the progress of external assessments using various tools in RGMS and extend the due date for an assessment if required.

5.1. Monitoring Progress for Multiple Applications

The Assignments – Assigners and Applications page allows you to monitor the progress of external assessors for all your assigned applications. It also allows you to filter for applications that meet specific criteria.

1. Navigate to the Assignments – Assigners and Applications page to view a list of your assigned applications. See Section 2.5 for more details.

2. For each application listed, your progress (e.g. the number of external assessors who have accepted invitations and completed assessments) is displayed in columns to the right. These columns are:

   - **Invitations** - the number of external assessors you have invited to review an application.
   - **Resend** - the number of invitations for an application that were resent after the two-day “no response” period.
   - **Accepted** - the number of external assessors who have accepted an invitation to review an application.
   - **Completed** - the number of completed assessments lodged in RGMS for an application.
   - **Declined** - the number of external assessors who have declined an invitation to review an application.
   - **Overdue** - the number of pending external assessments for an application that have passed the due date.
   - **Cancelled** - the number of invitations for an application that have been cancelled.
Filter options at the top right of the page allow you to customise which applications are displayed according to the criteria you enter. This can assist with identifying specific applications requiring attention. To filter by criteria:

a. Enter the desired number range(s) in the available fields. For example, if you wish to view only applications with four or more declined invitations, enter ‘4’ in the left column next to Declined and leave the right column blank.

b. Select Filter.

c. If you wish to reset the filters and display all applications, clear any values from the fields and select Filter again.

5.2. Monitoring Progress for a Specific Application

The assignments table on the Assigner Application – Assignments Properties page allows you to monitor the progress of external assessors for a specific application. The information provided in this table can be customised to monitor invitation, response and/or assessment progress.

1. Navigate to the Assigner Application – Assignments Properties page for the relevant application. See Section 2.5 for more details.

2. The assignments table at the bottom of the page is your main point of reference for monitoring external assessor progress. In addition to providing general information, such as the name and title of each potential assessor, you can also track:

a. Assessments Complete (see ‘a’ in below image) – This column shows the date each external assessment was completed and the total number of completed external assessments at the bottom of the column.
5.3. Extending the Due Date for an External Assessment

External assessors are initially asked to complete their assessment within 14 calendar days from the date they accept the invitation. However, an Academy member may extend the due date if required.

**IMPORTANT NOTE**

The due date for an external assessment cannot be extended past the **Assessment Must Be Completed By** date. See Step 3 below for further details.

To change the due date for an assessment:

1. Navigate to the **Assigner Application – Properties** page for the relevant application. See Section 2.5 for more details.

2. Select the hyperlink in the **Last Name** column of the relevant external assessor.

3. Note the **Assessment Must Be Completed By** date. Any extension cannot extend past this date.
4. Select the calendar icon next to the **Assessment Due Date** field. A calendar will appear as a pop-up window.

5. Select the new **Assessment Due Date**.

6. Select **Save**.

7. If you extend the due date of an assessment that was flagged as overdue, it will reset, removing the overdue assessment flag. The external assessor will also be notified that the due date has changed.