Examination of Higher Degree by Research Theses Policy

Section 1 - Purpose

(1) To complete a Higher Degree by Research (HDR) course, all candidates at the University of Canberra (University) are required to submit a thesis for external examination. The final outcome is determined by the University.

(2) This Policy outlines the thesis submission requirements, conditions for examination, course completion requirements and the granting and conferral of awards for HDR courses.

Section 2 - Scope

(3) This Policy applies to all candidates enrolled in HDR courses, and the staff involved in HDR supervision and administration at the University.

(4) This Policy is designed for use by University staff and HDR candidates.

(5) This Policy does not apply to non-research postgraduate courses.

Section 3 - Principles

(6) On completion of the accredited course of study and research, a HDR candidate will submit a thesis which presents the research and findings.

(7) The University understands research to include the creation of knowledge through various creative practices, as well as more traditional academic forms of scholarship. The term ‘thesis’ can refer to the creative product that results from a Higher Degree by Research, as well as traditional written text. The University accepts the definition of research used by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training.

(8) As set out in this Policy and the accompanying schedules, in circumstances where the primary supervisor is also the Associate Dean, Research of the Faculty, the approving authority must be Executive Dean of the Faculty or the Associate Dean, Research of another Faculty.

Submission

(9) A candidate must sign a declaration that the thesis does not contain any material published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text or footnotes. Material produced jointly by a candidate and his/her supervisors or others can only be included in the narrative of the thesis if the candidate was explicitly involved in the original work. Any jointly-produced material in the examination submission must be accompanied by a statement clearly indicating the candidate’s contribution to the research.

(10) No material or publications presented for examination for any other degree within this or any other institution will be submitted for assessment unless its incorporation in the thesis is declared in a statement.

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Content and Structural Requirements for the Thesis

(11) A doctoral thesis must make a distinct and significant contribution to knowledge or understanding in the area of research and/or the application of knowledge to the analysis of problems in the study area; and must afford evidence of originality.

(12) A masters thesis shall display a sound knowledge of the field of the research and include substantial critical review of the field.

(13) Subject to permission being obtained from publishers if necessary, the copyright of the thesis is deemed to be vested in the author. The relevant University policy for intellectual property principles as they relate to HDR candidates is the Intellectual Property Policy.

(14) The following applies to the length of the thesis:

a. A thesis submitted for a Doctor of Philosophy degree should not exceed 100,000 words.
b. A thesis submitted for a Professional Doctorate degree should not exceed 60,000 words.
c. A thesis submitted for a Masters by Research degree should not exceed 60,000 words.

(15) Thesis requirements will in part be dictated by disciplinary requirements and the type of thesis produced. See Higher Degree by Research Thesis Submission and Examination Guidelines for the thesis requirements of submissions for examination, including specific guidelines and requirements for the submission of a thesis consisting of published work.

Format Requirements for the Thesis

(16) The University has a set of generic formatting requirements for theses which are set out in the Higher Degree by Research Thesis Submission and Examination Guidelines.

(17) For research theses incorporating creative production, formatting requirements relate to the exegetical component of the thesis.

(18) It is expected that the supervisory panel will provide editorial advice to the candidate.

(19) Candidates may use a professional editor in preparing their thesis for submission but must strictly follow the guidelines set out in the Higher Degree by Research Thesis Submission and Examination Guidelines.

Submission of Thesis

(20) A candidate must be enrolled in order to submit a thesis.

(21) A candidate must submit a completed Intention to Submit a Thesis for Examination form to the HDR Support team no less than four weeks before the submission of the thesis for examination. A candidate will submit the thesis with the following completed forms:

a. Certificate of Completion of Thesis for Higher Degree by Research (signed by the candidate and all members of the supervisory panel)
b. Certificate of Authorship of Thesis (completed by the primary supervisor and the candidate)
c. Retention and Use of Thesis by the University (completed by the candidate)

(22) A candidate may request that the thesis be submitted without the support of the supervisory panel. This request must be made in writing to either the Dean or Associate Dean, Research of the relevant Faculty. A written recommendation will be returned to the candidate.

(23) If it is recommended that submission proceeds, the author of the recommendation returned to the candidate will become the single point of contact for all examination correspondence.

(24) If the recommendation does not support submission and the candidate still wishes to proceed, the Dean, Graduate Research School will review all relevant materials and liaise with the candidate from this point forward.

Examination

Appointment of Examiners

(25) It is the responsibility of the Associate Dean, Research to appoint examiners.

(26) The following general principles will apply to the appointment of examiners:

a. the Faculty will appoint a minimum of three external examiners (applies to Doctoral and Masters theses);
b. the primary supervisor will consult the candidate on potential examiners and will respect any reasonable objections the candidate may have to potential examiners;
c. the final identity of examiners will not be revealed to candidates till after the examination process has been completed;
d. examiners can elect to remain anonymous, but are advised that Freedom of Information legislation might limit the effectiveness of this option;
e. it is expected that an examiner will hold a research degree at the level sought by the candidate;
f. at least one examiner of a thesis should be a member of academic staff at a tertiary institution;
g. examiners will normally be active in research/scholarship thus ensuring that their knowledge of the field is current;
h. examiners will have expertise in the theoretical framework used by the candidate; and
i. examiners will be informed of the requirements and expectations of the University.

Conflict of Interest in Appointment of Examiners

(27) It is essential for a fair and transparent process that there is no conflict of interest in the appointment of examiners.

(28) In order to avoid any perceived or real conflict of interest, the following principles will apply:

a. a current or former member of the candidate’s supervisory panel, will not examine the thesis;
b. examiners will have had no significant formal affiliation with the University for three years preceding appointment;
c. there must be no joint publication between the examiner and any member of the supervisory panel for three years preceding appointment;
d. there must be no prior and/or ongoing personal or professional connection between the examiner and the candidate directly related to the thesis or thesis content; and
e. there must be no prior and/or ongoing personal connection between the examiner and the supervisory panel directly related to the thesis or thesis content.

(29) Implementation of the principles outlined in clauses 25 to 28 is the responsibility of the Associate Dean, Research. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor will be consulted should issues arise around implementation.

Conduct of Examination

(30) The University requests that examiners complete the examination and submit their reports within two months of

receipt of the thesis.

(31) Examiners may request, via the HDR Support team, to consult each other or to receive further information from the candidate or the supervisor, during the examination process.

(32) Neither the candidate nor the supervisory panel are to initiate contact on matters in direct relation to the thesis examination, with the examiners during the process. All contact will be managed by the HDR Support team.

(33) Theses examiners are paid honoraria as recommended by Universities Australia guidelines for Fees for External Examiners.

Examiners' Reports

(34) Examiners' reports must be returned by the examiners directly to the HDR Support team and not to the supervisory panel or the candidate.

(35) The examiner's report consists of two parts:

a. Part One: a recommendation of result and summary judgments on the thesis; and
b. Part Two: an extended report providing in-depth comments and recommendations including any changes the examiner recommends should be made to the thesis.

(36) In Part One of the report, an examiner will recommend either of the following:

a. that the candidate be awarded the degree; or
b. that the candidate be awarded the degree subject to amendments to the thesis of an editorial nature only, as specified in the report; or
c. that the candidate be awarded the degree subject to revisions to the thesis as specified in the report; or
d. that the candidate be required to resubmit the thesis in revised form for examination after a specified period of study/and or research, the nature of which is specified in the report; or
e. that the candidate not be awarded the degree.

(37) Before making a final recommendation, an examiner of a Doctoral thesis may recommend that a candidate be examined orally. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor will make the final determination as to whether an oral examination will be conducted based on this recommendation.

Examination Outcomes

(38) The HDR Support team will forward a copy of the examiners' reports to the candidate and primary supervisor. The candidate and the primary supervisor will then review the reports and respond as outlined in the Higher Degree by Research Examination Outcomes Procedure. The response required is determined by the nature of the examiners' recommendations.

(39) If recommendations are A, B or C (refer clause 36) all material should be reviewed by the Associate Dean, Research who will then inform Faculty HDR Committee and the University of the final recommendation for the thesis.

(40) D or E recommendations should be managed through the Faculty HDR Committee. Procedures are outlined in Higher Degree by Research Examination Outcomes Procedure.

(41) In all cases, it is the responsibility of the Associate Dean, Research to inform the University of the final recommendation for the thesis.

Completion of Examination Process and Award

(42) The final result of a thesis examination will be either an ungraded pass or a fail.

(43) To confirm the award of a Higher Degree by Research:

a. all academic and administrative requirements of the Higher Degree by Research course must be met;
b. Academic Board must grant the degree to the candidate; and
c. Academic Board must recommend that Council admit the candidate to the appropriate award.

(44) A recommendation to not award a Higher Degree by Research must be endorsed by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor before the result is finalised.

Appeal Against an Examination Result

(45) An appeal against an examination result must be made in writing to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor within two months of the candidate being advised of the result.

(46) An appeal may be lodged only against a decision not to award a Higher Degree by Research or a decision not to allow a thesis to be revised and resubmitted for a second and final examination.

(47) Appeals are permitted on the following procedural grounds only:

a. procedural irregularities in the conduct of the examination that may have had an effect on the outcome;
b. documentable evidence of prejudice or bias on the part of one or more of the examiners; and/or
c. failure to consult the candidate about the choice of examiners.

Retention of Theses by the University

(48) The following applies to the retention of theses by the University:

a. The candidate will lodge a bound copy and an electronic copy of the thesis, for which a Higher Degree by Research has been awarded, with the HDR Support team upon completion of the examination process (as per Higher Degree by Research Thesis Submission and Examination Guidelines).
b. Restricted access to a thesis will be considered by the Associate Dean, Research upon the request of the candidate or the primary supervisor prior to submission and agreed to only in compelling circumstances.
c. Where access or usage of a thesis is restricted, a statement of the conditions must be attached to the thesis.
d. The University Study Skills will make the thesis available for access after the initial period of restriction has expired unless a written request is received for an extension which must be approved by the Associate Dean, Research.
e. A copy of the thesis retained by the University will be available for loan to approved borrowers at the University Study Skills.

Conferral of Award

(49) The following applies to the conferral of Higher Degree by Research awards:

a. A Higher Degree by Research award will be granted by Academic Board to a candidate who has been certified as meeting the requirements of the particular academic course.
b. Upon the request of Academic Board, Council will admit the graduand to the named award, subject to the graduand’s compliance with University Statutes and Rules.
c. Higher Degree by Research awards may be conferred either at a graduation ceremony or in absentia.

d. A graduand may begin to use the appropriate title only after the award has been conferred.
e. A Higher Degree by Research graduand who is conferred in absentia in order to begin to use the appropriate title will be invited to attend the subsequent graduation ceremony.

Section 4 - Procedures

(50) Nil

Status and Details

Status	Historic
Effective Date	27th March 2023
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Custodian	Michelle Lincoln Deputy Vice-Chancellor
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