

Higher Degree by Research Thesis Examination Procedure



1 Purpose

To establish the process and requirements for examination of Higher Degree by Research (HDR) Theses at the University.

2 Scope

This procedure applies to all Students and Employees involved in the examination of a HDR Thesis.

3 Procedure Overview

This procedure establishes the examination process, criteria and grading of a HDR Thesis.

This procedure aligns with:

- *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021*: Standard 1.4 Learning Outcomes and Assessment; Standard 4.2 Research Training

4 Procedures

4.1 Thesis types

All HDR programs offered by the University include a Thesis component. Theses must be submitted for examination either as a:

- Standard Thesis;
- Thesis by Publication; or
- Thesis with Creative Works component.

4.2 Thesis Examination Process

4.2.1 Examiner nomination

Students intending to submit their Thesis for examination should advise their Principal HDR

Supervisor a minimum of 20 University Business Days prior to submission.

The Principal HDR Supervisor is responsible for identifying and nominating three suitably qualified examiners by completing the Nomination of Examiners Form. The Principal HDR Supervisor should confirm with the prospective examiners their willingness and availability to examine the Thesis within the required timeframe.

For doctoral level Academic Programs, examiners must be external to the University. For masters level Academic Programs, at least one of the examiners must be external to the University. Members of the HDR Supervisory Team are not eligible to act as examiners.

The Principal HDR Supervisor must declare any actual or perceived conflict of interest regarding examiners in accordance with the University's policies on conflicts of interest. If there is a conflict of interest between a member of the HDR Supervisory team and a nominated examiner, alternative examiners may be required.

The Nomination of Examiners Form must be approved by the Dean (Graduate Research School (GRS)).

Nomination of examiners should occur a minimum of 10 University Business Days prior to intended submission of the Thesis for examination.

4.2.2 Preparation of Thesis for examination

Students must complete the Statement by HDR Student Form when ready to submit a Thesis for examination. This form is required to confirm willingness to be examined and to certify that the Thesis is the Student's own, original work that has not been previously submitted for Assessment.

The Principal HDR Supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the Thesis is suitable for examination and that it conforms to the HDR Thesis Presentation Schedule. The Principal HDR Supervisor must provide written confirmation of this suitability by completing the Statement by HDR Supervisor Form.

If the Principal HDR Supervisor withholds approval for examination via the Statement by HDR Supervisor Form, the Student may request that the Thesis be examined without the Principal HDR Supervisor's approval via the Statement by HDR Student Form. The Dean (GRS) will consider the Student's request and may seek further information from the HDR Supervisory Team, the HDR Coordinator, the Student, or other parties, in order to decide if the Thesis can be sent for examination without the Principal HDR Supervisor's approval. The Dean (GRS) will inform the Student of the outcome.

If the Thesis is not approved for examination, then the Student may request a Review of Decision in accordance with section 4.4 of the Student Grievance Resolution Procedure.

The Student must provide both Statement by HDR Student Form and Statement by HDR Supervisor Form with an examinable copy of the Thesis to the Dean (GRS) for approval prior to the Thesis submission due date. Examiners are requested to return their reports within 30

University Business Days of receipt of the Thesis.

The Thesis and relevant forms will be sent to the Graduate Research School where the approval of the Dean (GRS) will be sought for the forms and the examiners. The thesis can then be despatched.

4.2.3 Submission of Thesis to the examiners

A Student's candidature ends when the Thesis is submitted for examination. This does not officially occur until the Thesis has been sent for examination by the GRS and the Student has been notified.

A Thesis will be examined in the first instance by two appropriately qualified examiners. In cases of significant discrepancies between examiners, the Thesis will be sent to a third examiner.

Normally the Thesis will be examined using an electronic copy.

The examination process is confidential. Communication between examiners is not normally permitted. Should an examiner wish to contact another examiner, a request in writing explaining the reasons for the interaction must be provided for consideration by the GRS for Decision by the Dean (GRS). Under no circumstances will an examiner's details be revealed to other examiners without their consent.

An honorarium is paid by the University to examiners in accordance with the recommendations of Universities Australia.

Students may request the identities of their examiners once the examination process has concluded. The examiner details will only be released if they have indicated on the Examination Report that they are happy for their identity to be revealed to the Student.

4.2.4 Thesis examination criteria

The Thesis will be examined according to the following criteria:

1. The extent to which the candidate has demonstrated:
 - a. originality;
 - b. critical insight; and
 - c. capacity to carry out independent research.

2. The extent of the contribution to knowledge and, in particular, to the understanding of the subject with which it deals.

3. The suitability of the Thesis for publication.

4.2.5 Grading of Thesis

Each examiner will award the Thesis one of five Grades listed below.

1. Pass - The Student satisfies the requirements of the Academic Program with only typographical and similar corrections to be completed where indicated to the satisfaction of the HDR Supervisory Team and HDR Coordinator. The resubmission due date is 10 University Business Days from the date of advice to the Student, unless otherwise indicated.
2. Pass subject to Minor Revisions - the Student satisfies the requirements of the Academic Program subject to the specified minor revisions being completed to the satisfaction of the HDR Supervisory Team and HDR Coordinator). Minor revisions include rewriting sections of the Thesis without necessitating significant additional work. The resubmission due date is two months from the date of advice to the Student, unless otherwise indicated.
3. Pass subject to Major Revisions - the Student satisfies the requirements of the Academic Program subject to the specified major revisions being completed to the satisfaction of the HDR Coordinator-appointed review panel. Major revisions would include substantial rewrites to one or more of the chapters. The resubmission due date is six months from date of notification to the Student, unless otherwise indicated. Students may need to re-Enrol if required to undertake major revisions.
4. Resubmit to the examiners following rewriting - the Student be required to revise the Thesis substantially and resubmit the Thesis for examination, normally by the original examiners. The resubmission due date is six months from the date of notification to the Student, unless otherwise indicated. Students may need to re-Enrol if required to undertake revisions for resubmission to examiners.
5. Fail - the Thesis be failed as it does not satisfy the requirements of the Academic Program and the Student not be permitted to resubmit the Thesis for re-examination.

Examiners will normally return to the GRS the Examiner's Pro-forma with a recommended Grade, as well as a separate examiner's report detailing feedback, by the due date. Once all reports are returned, they will be collated and sent to the Dean (GRS) for a recommendation of the overall Grade for the Thesis. This recommendation will be based on the Grades of the individual examiners aggregated in accordance with the matrix tables below to calculate an overall Grade. Comments provided by the examiners in support of their recommended Grades will also be taken into consideration. This overall Grade will be approved by the Dean (Graduate Research School) prior to Student notification.

4.2.6 Two Examiner Matrix

Decision matrix when two examiners are involved:

| Examiners' Recommendation | | | | | University Decision |
|---------------------------|---------------|---------------|----------|------|--------------------------|
| Pass | Minor Rewrite | Major Rewrite | Resubmit | Fail | Result |
| 2 | | | | | Pass |
| 1 | 1 | | | | Minor Rewrite |
| 1 | | 1 | | | Minor Rewrite |
| 1 | | | 1 | | 3 rd Examiner |
| 1 | | | | 1 | 3 rd Examiner |
| | 2 | | | | Minor Rewrite |
| | 1 | 1 | | | Minor Rewrite |
| | 1 | | 1 | | Major Rewrite |
| | 1 | | | 1 | 3 rd Examiner |
| | | 2 | | | Major Rewrite |
| | | 1 | 1 | | Major Rewrite |
| | | 1 | | 1 | Resubmit |
| | | | 2 | | Resubmit |
| | | | 1 | 1 | Resubmit |
| | | | | 2 | Fail |

4.2.7 Three Examiner Matrix

A third examiner will be appointed to address a variance in the examiners' recommendations, as per the table above. If a third examiner is appointed, the examiner will not have access to the other examiners' recommendations or written advice. The final Decision shall be based on the recommendation of the three examiners, as shown in the matrix below, with appropriate consideration of the comments provided to support the recommendations.

Decision matrix when three examiners are involved:

| Examiners' Recommendation | | | | | University Decision |
|---------------------------|-------|---------------|----------|------|---------------------|
| Pass | Minor | Major Rewrite | Resubmit | Fail | Result |

| | Rewrite | | | | |
|---|---------|---|---|---|---------------|
| 2 | | | 1 | | Pass |
| 2 | | | | 1 | Pass |
| 1 | 1 | | 1 | | Minor Rewrite |
| 1 | 1 | | | 1 | Minor Rewrite |
| | 2 | | | 1 | Minor Rewrite |
| 1 | | 1 | 1 | | Major Rewrite |
| 1 | | 1 | | 1 | Major Rewrite |
| | 1 | 1 | | 1 | Major Rewrite |
| 1 | | | 1 | 1 | Resubmit |
| | 1 | | 1 | 1 | Resubmit |
| 1 | | | 2 | | Resubmit |
| 1 | | | | 2 | Resubmit |
| | 1 | | | 2 | Resubmit |

4.2.8 Notification of outcome

The GRS will provide Notice to the Student on the outcome of the Thesis examination process and the nature and due date of any required revisions. The Student must not be informed of the outcome of the examination process by any other member of the University including the HDR Supervisory Team.

4.2.9 Revisions and re-examination

Students may be required to undertake revisions to the Thesis following examination. Students must demonstrate that they have engaged clearly and thoroughly with the feedback provided by each examiner and prepare a summary document that specifically details how the Thesis has been revised to address the feedback of the examiners. Students may elect to defend or amend certain sections of the Thesis based on comments from examiners.

Students are required to complete the revisions and forward the revised Thesis and summary document to the GRS by the date nominated. The HDR Coordinator will review the revisions and the summary document to ensure they have been completed satisfactorily. Failure to complete the required revisions by the nominated due date may result in the Student having to re-Enrol for the next available Study Period and undergo performance management processes.

In cases of major revision or resubmission the Student will be required to complete the revisions to the satisfaction of a review panel appointed by the HDR Coordinator. In such cases, the

Student will also need to re-Enrol in the next available Study Period to complete their revisions and/or resubmit for examination.

In the event of the Student being required to resubmit, examiners will be invited by the Principal HDR Supervisor to re-examine the Thesis. Examiners will receive the comments from the other examiners without the identity of the examiners being revealed.

An additional honorarium shall be payable for re-examination.

If an examiner does not agree to re-examine the resubmission, a new examiner will be nominated by the Principal HDR Supervisor as per the nomination of examiners process (refer Section 3.2.1, Examiner Nomination).

4.2.10 Completion of examination

Once a Thesis has been examined and the Student has made suitable revisions to the satisfaction of the HDR Coordinator, the HDR Coordinator will recommend provisional awarding of the degree. This recommendation will then be forwarded to the Dean (Graduate Research School) for approval and the Student will be notified of successfully completing the examination process.

4.2.11 Offering of an alternative Award

In those cases where the Thesis does not satisfy the requirements of a doctoral Academic Program, a Student may be offered, on the recommendation of the examiners, one of the following:

1. Accepted for a research masters degree - the Student satisfies the requirements of a research masters degree with only typographical and similar corrections to be made where indicated to the satisfaction of the HDR Supervisory Team and the HDR Coordinator.
2. Accepted for a research masters degree subject to Minor Revisions - the Student satisfies the requirements of a research masters degree subject to the specified minor revisions being completed to the satisfaction of the HDR Supervisory Team and the HDR Coordinator).
3. Unacceptable for a research masters degree - the work has failed to satisfy the requirements of the degree and the Student not be permitted to submit for re-examination for any HDR Award at the University.

4.3 Thesis by Publication examination

Students may elect to present their Thesis in the form of research papers published or presented for publication in peer-reviewed journals. The examination for a Thesis by Publication

will follow the processes as outlined above in Section 4.2, Thesis Examination Process.

4.4 Thesis with Creative Works examination

The examination process for a Thesis with Creative Works will follow the processes as outlined above in Section 4.2, Thesis Examination Process, with the following additional considerations:

1. The Student is normally required to provide an electronic copy of the creative component. For projects that involve a major creative presentation, the examiners may also be required to attend in person. Reasonable costs will be met by the University. Costs should be identified and approved as part of the Confirmation of Candidature process. The attendance of examiners will be organised by the GRS.
2. Where examiners are required to attend an exhibition, the Exegesis and an electronic copy of the creative works should be submitted to the GRS at least 30 University Business Days prior to the visit by the examiners unless prior arrangements have been approved by the HDR Coordinator. In situations where it is not possible to submit an electronic copy with the Exegesis, then a digital record must be provided to the GRS no more than 10 University Business Days after the date of the performance.
3. The Student is responsible for the organisation and costs of all exhibitions and/or presentations.
4. Presentations/exhibitions should be outlined in detail and approved as part of the Confirmation of Candidature process. Exhibition/performance space will need to be finalised at the time of Confirmation of Candidature.
5. Examiners are not permitted at any time to conduct a formal or informal viva voce (oral) examination with the Student. Examiners are also not permitted to confer with each other before, during or after viewing the creative works.

5 References

Nil.

6 Schedules

This procedure must be read in conjunction with its subordinate schedules as provided in the table below.

7 Procedure Information

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| Accountable Officer | Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) |
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| Responsible Officer | Dean (Graduate Research School) |
| Policy Type | University Procedure |
| Policy Suite | Higher Degree by Research Student Policy |
| Subordinate Schedules | Higher Degree by Research Thesis Presentation Schedule Higher Degree by Research Thesis Submission Schedule |
| Approved Date | 10/11/2016 |
| Effective Date | 10/11/2016 |
| Review Date | 10/11/2021 |
| Relevant Legislation | Electronic Transactions Act 1999 Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 Higher Education Support Act 2003 |
| Policy Exceptions | Policy Exceptions Register |
| Related Policies | Academic Programs and Courses Quality Policy Assessment Policy Award Eligibility and Graduation Policy Code of Conduct Policy Handling Personal Student Information Policy and Procedure Privacy Policy Records and Information Management Policy Student Grievance Resolution Policy |
| Related Procedures | Assessment Procedure Employee Conflict of Interest Procedure Higher Degree by Research Student Progress Procedure Student Appeals Procedure Student Grievance Resolution Procedure |
| Related forms, publications and | HDR Forms |

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| websites | Universities Australia |
| Definitions | <p data-bbox="467 183 1129 219">Terms defined in the Definitions Dictionary</p> <p data-bbox="467 250 746 286">Academic Program</p> <p data-bbox="467 331 1481 524">An approved Higher Education Award of the University, consisting of a combination of Courses the successful completion of an offering of which, together with any credit transfers and Exemptions in accordance with the relevant requirements, will fulfil the prescribed requirements for that particular Award.</p> <p data-bbox="467 568 571 604">Appeal</p> <p data-bbox="467 649 1481 725">A formal, written request made by a Student or Employee to a higher authority to have a Decision overturned.</p> <p data-bbox="467 770 651 806">Assessment</p> <p data-bbox="467 851 1481 927">The process of evaluating the extent to which Students have achieved the Learning Outcomes of a Course.</p> <p data-bbox="467 972 596 1008">Decision</p> <p data-bbox="467 1052 1481 1128">A determination made by an Employee, contractor or other authorised delegate in the course of their duties on behalf of the University.</p> <p data-bbox="467 1173 619 1209">Enrolment</p> <p data-bbox="467 1254 1481 1330">The process of admitting Students to one or more Courses for the current Academic Year.</p> <p data-bbox="467 1375 603 1411">Exegesis</p> <p data-bbox="467 1456 1481 1599">A form of written assessment that accompanies a Student's creative works. The Exegesis will normally provide a rationale for the techniques and strategies adopted in the creative works and situate them in relation to the theoretical and/or historical cultural context.</p> <p data-bbox="467 1644 667 1680">Grade (noun)</p> <p data-bbox="467 1724 1481 1800">A Grade is a code that indicates the status of the Assessment of Student performance against the Learning Outcomes of a Course.</p> <p data-bbox="467 1845 970 1881">Higher Degree by Research (HDR)</p> <p data-bbox="467 1926 1481 2047">A Research Doctorate or Research Masters program for which at least two-thirds of the Student load for the program is required as research work.</p> |

[Higher Degree by Research \(HDR\) Coordinator](#)

The HDR Coordinator is responsible for managing and supporting HDR candidates within an organisational unit. For UniSQ Schools, the HDR Coordinator is the Associate Head of School (Research) or nominee/s. For UniSQ Centres, the HDR Coordinator is the Associate Centre Director or nominee/s. For UniSQ Colleges, the HDR Coordinator is the Head of College or nominee/s.

[Higher Degree by Research \(HDR\) Student](#)

A Student enrolled in an HDR program.

[Higher Degree by Research \(HDR\) Supervisor](#)

A member of a Student's HDR Supervisory Team. An HDR Supervisor may hold the position of Principal HDR Supervisor or Associate Supervisor.

[Notice](#)

A Notice from the University is a document, whether physical or electronic. A Notice may be: given by hand to the addressee or delivered to the address provided by the addressee to the University; or sent by registered or pre-paid mail to the address provided by the addressee to the University; or sent by electronic communication to the University-issued email account provided by the University to a Student during the period of Enrolment until the completion of their program; or sent by electronic communication to the email address provided to the University by an addressee not enrolled at the University. A Notice is taken to be received if: given by hand to the addressee or delivered to the address provided to the University by the addressee; or sent by registered or pre-paid mail - three University Business Days after the date of posting; or sent by electronic communication - at the time that would be the time of receipt under the Electronic Transactions Act 1999 or its succeeding legislation. A Notice that would be deemed to have been received out of business hours or on a non-University Business Day will instead be deemed received on the next University Business Day.

[Semester](#)

A period of time during which instruction is provided, learning is undertaken and Assessment is carried out. There are three Semester periods during an Academic Year, known consecutively as Semester 1, Semester 2 and Semester 3.

[Student](#)

A person who is enrolled in a UniSQ Upskill Course or who is admitted to an Award Program or Non-Award Program offered by the University and is: currently enrolled in one or more Courses or study units; or not currently enrolled but is on an approved Leave of Absence or whose admission has not been cancelled.

[Thesis](#)

Also known as a Standard Thesis, is the material outcomes of a program of research. It is also referred to as a 'dissertation'.

[Thesis by Publication](#)

A Thesis where some chapters are in the form of research papers published in, or submitted to, peer-reviewed journals.

[Thesis with Creative Works](#)

A Thesis with Creative Works includes original work such as multimedia, film, exhibition, performance, musical composition, novel, play or other Faculty approved production, in addition to an Exegesis.

[University](#)

The term 'University' or 'UniSQ' means the University of Southern Queensland.

[University Business Days](#)

The days of Monday to Friday inclusive between 9am and 5pm Australian Eastern Standard Time (AEST), with the exclusion of gazetted Public Holidays for the relevant campus location, plus the closure of the University between 25 December and 1 January in the following year inclusive as specified in the Enterprise Agreement, as well as any closure of the University either at one or several campuses in accordance with a direction of the Crisis Management Team.

Definitions that relate to this procedure only

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Keywords

PhD, dissertation, thesis, doctoral

Record No

15/1767PL