

## Higher Degree Research Assessment and Assessment Appeals Policy

<b>Policy Category</b>	Rule/ <b>Policy</b> /Plan/Guidelines/Operating Procedures		
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### 1. Purpose

The Institute is committed to providing a quality educational experience for all of its higher degree research students. An important element in the provision of a quality educational experience is ensuring that the assessment of higher degree research is undertaken in an academically rigorous, transparent, fair and timely manner. This policy outlines the process by which higher degree research students will submit their theses and have them examined.

### 2. Scope

This policy applies to all full-time and sessional academic staff of the Institute, candidates enrolled in Higher Degree Research at the Institute, and examiners of theses submitted by the Institute students. It does not apply to degrees by coursework. The provisions of this policy are supplementary to those in the *Assessment Policy and Procedures (Coursework)*.

### 3. Definitions

**Examination** - means the examination of a thesis as the basis for the award of a higher degree by research.

**Examiner** - means a person appointed to examine a higher degree by research thesis. An examiner may be an internal or an external examiner.

**External Examiner** - means a suitably qualified person who is not an employee of the Institute. Persons who have previously been employed by the Institute, and who have not been involved in the candidature, may be approved as external examiners.

**Internal Examiner** - means a suitably qualified person who is an employee of the Institute.

**External Adjudicator** – is an experienced academic in the subject area of the thesis, and who is not an employee of the Institute. He or she will formally consider the thesis, the examiners’ reports and any other relevant documents to make an independent assessment of the quality of the thesis under examination.

**Principal Supervisor** – will have primary responsibility for the supervision of the candidate and reporting to the Institute’s HDRSC on the candidate’s academic progress.

**Co-Supervisor** – will work with the Principal Supervisor in providing appropriate supervision to the candidate.

**Research** – is the systematic experimental and theoretical work, application and/or development that results in an advancement in knowledge, culminating in a thesis that is formally examined.

**Higher Degree, Research and Scholarships Committee (HDRSC)** – is the responsible managerial body for the Institute’s higher degree programs delivery and other research and scholarly activities.

**Thesis** – comprises the major assessable research outputs presented for examination that demonstrate a candidate’s original contribution to knowledge.

#### **4. Procedures**

- i. On completion of the course of advanced study and/or research, the candidate shall present for examination a thesis in the form endorsed by the Higher Degree, Research and Scholarships Committee (HDRSC), embodying the results of the candidate’s original contribution.
- ii. The thesis, exclusive of any appendices, shall not usually exceed 50,000 words for a Research Masters degree and 100,000 words for a Research Doctoral degree.
- iii. The candidate will state generally in the Introduction and specifically in the body of the thesis all sources from which the information is derived. The candidate will clearly differentiate his/her original contribution of data and its interpretation, the extent to which the work of others has been used and the portion of the thesis is claimed as an original contribution.
- iv. The candidate shall not present in the thesis any work that has been the basis of the award of a degree unless it is clearly identified as such.
- v. The candidate upon submission of the thesis for examination shall make arrangements approved by the HDRSC for all original data to be retained in an area for safe storage in a central repository at the Institute for a period of not less than five years. The data stored must be in a form that would permit replication of all analyses reported in the thesis.
- vi. The candidate shall submit to the Secretary of the HDRSC and the Principal Supervisor one copy in digital format approved by the Committee. Exemption from submitting the thesis in digital form in whole or in part may be granted by the HDRSC.
- vii. At the time of submitting the thesis for examination the Principal Supervisor will present a formal statement to the HDRSC stating that the Principal and Co-Supervisor(s) have discussed with the candidate the academic content and findings in the thesis and agree that it is in a form suitable for examination while neither expressing or implying a judgment concerning the merits of the research.
- viii. The Principal Supervisor will present a list of four potential examiners for a Masters Degree and five potential examiners for a Doctoral degree, together with supporting documentation. The Examiners are expected to be academically reputable in the field of the thesis, with a significant body of published work, or other publicly recognized output as appropriate for their discipline. Examiners should typically hold a qualification at least equivalent to the level of the award being examined.
- ix. The HDRSC shall approve and approach two examiners for a Masters Degree and three examiners for a doctoral degree. One further examiner will be identified as an alternate.
- x. All examiners must be external to the Institute and normally at least one of the examiners for a PhD shall be external to Australia.
- xi. The recommendation of the examiners is confidential and must not be revealed to the candidate at any time.  
If an examiner fails to report within three months after adequate reminder, the

HDRSC can appoint an alternate examiner and notify the earlier examiner that his/her services are no longer required.

- xii. If a replacement examiner is required then the replacement examiner will be the alternate selected by the HDRSC. If an alternate is unavailable from the pool of examiners originally provided by the Principal Supervisor, the HDRSC may decide to request the Principal Supervisor submit the names and supporting documents for additional potential examiners
- xiii. No person who has been involved in the supervision of the candidate shall be appointed examiner. No person who is or has been in a personal relationship with the candidate or the supervisors will be approved to be an examiner. No person who has been a co-author with the candidate or the supervisors over the past five years will be approved to be an examiner.
- xiv. The candidate is wholly responsible for the content and submission of the thesis for examination.

### Examiners' Reports

Each examiner shall submit an independent, written report on the merits of the thesis which shall contain an assessment of the thesis in relation to the stated thesis objectives. The report shall include one of the following recommendations:

- i. **Award with no/minor amendments:** *the thesis be classified as passed. The examiner may specify this category for a thesis that does not require any amendments.; or*
- ii. **Require minor corrections:** *the thesis be classified as passed conditionally, subject to minor corrections, as outlined in the Examiner's Report, being made to the satisfaction of the Principal Supervisor, within 6 weeks of official notification of the examination outcome. The examiner may specify this category for a thesis which requires correction of errors of presentation and minor deficiencies but which are not of sufficient importance to warrant major corrections; or*
- iii. **Require major corrections:** *the thesis be classified as passed conditionally, subject to corrections, as outlined in the Examiners' Report, being made to the satisfaction of the Dean as specified by the Committee, within eight weeks of official notification of the examination outcome. The examiner may specify this category for a thesis which requires correction of deficiencies other than errors of presentation, but which are not of sufficient importance to warrant submission for re-examination by the original examiner; or*
- iv. **Revise and resubmit:** *the thesis to be submitted in a revised form for re-examination by the original examiners, where appropriate. The examiner may specify this category for a thesis which requires major, substantive amendment and submission for re-examination. In the Examiner's Report, the examiner shall provide detailed guidance to the candidate to assist revision. The candidate must then resubmit the thesis together with a statement by the candidate outlining the revisions that have been made.*
- v. **Do not award the degree:** *The thesis does not meet the standards for the award of the degree as specified in the Australian Qualifications Framework and does not warrant a further period of research and/or writing. The candidate should not be awarded the degree, nor should they be permitted to revise and submit for re-examination.*
- vi. **Allow revision and re-submission as a Masters by Research Thesis (For PhD theses only):** *The thesis does not meet the standards for the award of the degree as specified in the Australian Qualifications Framework. The candidate should not be awarded the degree of PhD, nor should the candidate be permitted to revise and submit for re-examination of the thesis as a PhD. The candidate be allowed*

*to revise the thesis and re-submit the thesis for examination as a Masters by Research.*

### **Thesis Examination Outcomes**

After considering the recommendations of the examiners, the HDRSC may:

- i. recommend that the degree be awarded;*
- ii. recommend that the degree be awarded conditional upon the making of such amendments as the HDRSC deems appropriate;*
- iii. request the examiners consult with and report to the HDRSC;*
- iv. appoint an additional examiner or examiners;*
- v. appoint an external adjudicator who shall consider and report to the HDRSC upon the thesis and any supporting papers invited or requested by the HDRSC and the examiners' reports;*
- vi. require the candidate to sit for such written, oral and practical examinations as the committee may prescribe;*
- vii. permit a candidate to revise the thesis for re-examination if, in the opinion of the Committee the work is of sufficient merit to warrant this concession;*
- viii. recommend that the degree be not awarded;*
- ix. allow revision and re-submission as a Masters by Research Thesis (For PhD theses only).*

Where the examiners' recommendations are not unanimous, and before making any final recommendation, the HDRSC may take one or more of the following actions:

- i. Seek advice from the Principal Supervisor and/or Dean;*
- ii. Appoint an additional examiner;*
- iii. Appoint an external adjudicator: an external adjudicator will only be appointed by the HDRSC if the examiners are unable to come to a consensus recommendation. If the adjudicator recommends that the candidate's thesis be revised and resubmitted, then the adjudicator will serve as the sole examiner for the resubmitted thesis.*
- iv. Invite the examiners to confer with each other and/or with the HDRSC, with a view to the presentation of a consolidated recommendation;*
- v. Direct that the candidate undertake such further examinations either oral, written or practical.*

- A candidate awarded the degree shall complete minor amendments within three months and major amendments within six months. These will be made to the satisfaction of the Principal Supervisor.
- A candidate permitted to revise a thesis for re-examination shall complete the revision within 9 months under the supervision of a Principal Supervisor or supervisors endorsed by the HDRSC.
- A candidate who has revised a thesis and resubmitted it for examination as directed by the HDRSC, and who fails the re-examination shall not be eligible for any further examination.
- A doctoral candidate may be awarded the PhD *cum laude* in cases where the examiners, unanimously and independently, agree that the thesis is of exceptional quality in every respect and can be awarded without requirement for more than minor editorial amendment.

### **Process Upon Recommendation of “Degree Not Be Awarded”**

Where any examination, adjudication or consultation report is received by the HDRSC, on which basis the HDRSC is considering recommending that the candidate not be awarded the degree, the candidate and their Principal Supervisor shall be notified in writing of the content of that report and may within eight weeks lodge a response limited to the academic and substantive matters raised therein. The HDRSC shall take into account the submissions of the Principal Supervisor and/or student in determining whether the degree be awarded.

### **Appeals against a Recommendation of “Degree Not Be Awarded”.**

- i. Candidates have the right of appeal against an unfavourable examination outcome and will be invited to submit a report to the Academic Board detailing any concerns they may have about the examination process. The formal appeal must be made in writing to the Academic Board within four weeks of receiving the advice of the unfavourable outcome. The formal appeal, recommendation, all Examiners’ Reports, candidate responses and any other relevant material shall then be referred to the Academic Board for review and final decision.
- ii. Appeals will be permitted on procedural grounds only. Procedural grounds for appeal may include:  
Procedural irregularities in the conduct of the examination; or  
Documentary evidence of prejudice or bias on the part of one or more examiners.
- iii. Academic Board will not consider any appeal where the candidate simply rejects the academic assessments of his or her work or where the candidate complains about inadequacy of supervision or other problems arising during the course of the candidate’s Masters or PhD Program (problems encountered during candidature should be handled by grievance procedures at the appropriate time).
- iv. Any member of the Academic Board involved in making the unfavourable examination outcome will absent themselves from all discussions of the appeal. There shall be no appeal against the final decision of the Academic Board.

### **5. Related Documents:**

1. Higher Degree Research Assessment and Assessment Appeals Policy
2. Higher Degree, Research and Scholarships Committee Terms of Reference
3. Higher Degree Research Confirmation of Candidature and Progression Review Policy and Procedure
4. Higher Degree Research Supervision Policy
5. Research Human Research Ethics Policy
6. Research Materials and Data Management Policy