

# HIGHER DEGREE BY RESEARCH ASSESSMENT AND ASSESSMENT APPEALS PROCEDURE

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## 1 PURPOSE

This procedure supports the *Higher Degree Research by Assessment and Assessment Appeals Policy* by documenting the requirements and processes relevant to the examination of theses.

## 2 SCOPE

This procedure applies to candidates enrolled in HDR courses, and to academic and administrative staff, and any persons external to IMC, such as examiners, involved in the assessment of theses, including appeals regarding such assessment.

## 3 PROCEDURES

### 3.1 Thesis Submission

- Candidates must present for examination a thesis, in a form approved by the Research

and Scholarship Committee (RSC), embodying the results of the candidate's original contribution to knowledge.

- The thesis, including footnotes but excluding the bibliography, reference list and appendices will not normally exceed 35,000 words for a HDR at master level and will not normally exceed 100,000 words for a HDR at doctoral level.
- The format of the thesis must align with the guidelines set out in IMC's *HDR Handbook*.
- For further information on thesis preparation candidates should refer to IMC's *HDR Handbook*.
- Candidates may use IMC recommended AI tools such as software-generated proofreading and grammar correction tools in alignment with *IMC's Artificial Intelligence Policy* and associated guidelines.
- Candidates must properly and comprehensively attribute all content arising from, or informed by, the work of others, in line with relevant disciplinary norms.
- Candidates must identify all content resulting from the use of Generative AI or AI-assisted technology in any part of the research, writing, or editing processes, in alignment with IMC AI guidelines.
- Theses must not contain content that has been the basis for the award of another qualification, unless it is clearly identified as such.
- Thesis must include a statement that the research process has adhered to all conditions imposed in any relevant ethics approvals.
- Candidates must retain any original data, in a form that would permit replication of all analyses reported in the thesis, in a central repository at IMC for a period of not less than five years.
- Before candidates may submit a thesis, the principal supervisor, in consultation with associate supervisors, must agree that it is in a form suitable for examination.
- At the time the thesis is submitted, the principal supervisor must provide a formal statement to the RSC stating that the supervisors have discussed the academic content and findings with the candidate and agree that it is in a form suitable for examination, neither expressing nor implying any judgment concerning the merits of the research.
- Candidates must submit to the Research Office and to the Principal Supervisor one copy of the thesis in a digital format approved by the RSC.
- The candidate is wholly responsible for the content and submission of the thesis for examination.

### 3.2 Examiner Selection and Appointment

- Examiners must be research active and academically reputable in a discipline relevant to the thesis, having a significant body of published work, or other publicly recognised outputs appropriate to their discipline.
- Examiners should normally hold a qualification at least equivalent to the level of the award for which a thesis is being examined.
- Two examiners must be appointed for a master level thesis and three examiners must be appointed for a doctoral level thesis.
- The Director of Research and Scholarship, in consultation with the Principal Supervisor and other IMC academics from relevant disciplines, nominates the proposed examiners for the thesis for approval by the RSC.
- The Research Office or Principal Supervisor must confirm the willingness and availability of potential examiners to examine the thesis within relevant timeframes before providing a list of potential examiners to the RSC.
- The Research Office approaches, two potential examiners for a master level thesis and three potential examiners for a doctoral level thesis.
- For each thesis exam, one additional potential examiner is selected, and approached, to act as an alternate examiner, in cases where, for whatever reason, an examiner is unable to continue in their role.
- The RSC may, at any time, ask the Principal Supervisor to provide details of further potential examiners.
- The three examiners for AQF Level 10 theses examination must be external to, and independent of, IMC.
- The two examiners for AQF Level 9 theses must include at least one external examiner, independent of IMC.
- No examiners will have been involved in the supervision of the candidate whose thesis is being examined.
- In the case of a doctoral level thesis, at least one of the examiners is of international standing.
- The RSC appoints the examiners.

- In appointing examiners, the RSC must take all reasonable steps to ensure that examiners are free from bias against the candidate, the Principal Supervisor, Associate Supervisors, and IMC.
- In appointing examiners, the RSC must ensure that examiners are free from actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest.
- No person who has been involved in supervising the candidate; who is, or has been, in a personal relationship with the candidate; who has been a co-author with the candidate.
- The appointment of examiners is confidential and their details must not be revealed to the candidate at any time.

### 3.3 Examination Process

- Examiners are expected to provide a report within two months of receiving the thesis.
- If an examiner fails to provide a report within three months of receiving the thesis, the RSC may appoint an alternate examiner.
- Each examiner must submit an independent, written report (using the template in *Appendix A*) on the academic merits of the thesis, including an assessment in relation to the stated thesis objectives, and a summary of its academic strengths and weaknesses.
- The examiner's report must include one of the following recommendations:
  - that the thesis be accepted for the award of the degree.
  - that the thesis be accepted for the award of the degree, subject to minor amendments specified in the examiner's report being made to the satisfaction of the Principal Supervisor. Examiners should make this recommendation for a thesis that requires correction of errors of presentation and minor deficiencies, but which are not of sufficient importance to warrant major amendments.
  - that the thesis be accepted for the award of the degree, subject to major amendments specified in the examiner's report being made to the satisfaction of the RSC. Examiners should make this recommendation for a thesis that requires correction of deficiencies other than errors of presentation and minor deficiencies, but which are not of sufficient importance to warrant submission for re-examination by the examiners.
  - that the thesis be revised, in accordance with requirements detailed in the examiner's report, and be resubmitted for examination by the examiners.

- that the thesis be submitted in a revised form for re-examination by the original examiners, where appropriate. Examiners should make this recommendation for a thesis requiring major and substantive amendments of a magnitude requiring re-examination by the examiners. The examination report should provide detailed guidance to the candidate to assist revision. The candidate must resubmit the revised thesis with a statement outlining the revisions that have been made.
- that the degree not be awarded. Examiners should make this recommendation where the thesis does not meet the standards for the award as specified in the *Australian Qualifications Framework*, and where it exhibits a magnitude of deficiency that renders rectification within a reasonable time highly improbable.

### 3.4 Examination Outcomes

- 3.4.1 After considering the reports and recommendations of the examiners, the RSC may:
- recommend that the degree be awarded;
  - recommend that the degree be awarded conditional upon the candidate making such amendments as the RSC deems appropriate;
  - request that the examiners consult with one another and report to the RSC any changes in their view of the thesis;
  - seek interpretive input from the principal supervisor or associate supervisor in relation to examiner reports
  - appoint an additional examiner or examiners;
  - require the candidate to sit for such written, oral and practical examinations as the RSC may prescribe;
  - request that a candidate revise the thesis for re-examination;
  - recommend that the degree not be awarded
- 3.4.2 Where the examiners' recommendations are not unanimous, and before making any final recommendation, the RSC may take one or more of the following actions:
- seek advice from the Principal Supervisor or Deputy President;
  - appoint an additional examiner;
  - invite the examiners to confer with each other and/or with the RSC, with a view to achieving consensus on a recommendation;
  - direct that the candidate undertakes further examinations - either oral, written or practical.
- 3.4.3 A candidate must complete minor amendments within three months and major amendments within six months, to the satisfaction of the Principal Supervisor and the RSC

A candidate permitted to revise a thesis for re-examination must complete the revision, under the supervision of a Principal Supervisor endorsed by the RSC and resubmit within a timeframe specified by the RSC and not exceeding 12 months.

A candidate who has revised a thesis and resubmitted it for examination, and who fails the re-examination, shall not be eligible for any further examination.

3.4.4 Where any examination, or other, report is received by the RSC, on which basis the RSC is considering recommending that a degree not be awarded, then the candidate and their Principal Supervisor are notified in writing of the content of that report, and may, within eight weeks of that notification being made, lodge a response limited to the academic and substantive matters raised therein. The RSC shall take into account such responses in determining the examination outcome.

3.4.5 The RSC's decisions are documented using the template at *Appendix B*.

- A candidate who has revised a thesis and resubmitted it for examination as directed by the RSC, and who fails the re-examination shall not be eligible for any further examination.

### **3.5 Requirements for Amendments and Revisions**

- Candidates making minor amendments to a thesis must complete these within three months of receiving formal notification of the examination outcome and being provided with details of the required amendments.
- Candidates making major amendments to a thesis must complete these within six months of receiving formal notification of the examination outcome and being provided with details of the required amendments.
- Candidates revising and resubmitting a thesis must complete the revision, under the guidance of Principal Supervisor, within twelve months of receiving formal notification of the examination outcome and being provided with examiners' reports.
- Candidates revising and resubmitting a thesis are not eligible to make subsequent revisions and resubmissions, although they may make minor and major amendments.

### **3.6 Appeals Process**

#### **3.6.1 Grounds for Appeal**

- A candidate may only appeal an unfavourable examination outcome on procedural grounds limited to:
  - a) Evidence of a significant breach of IMC regulation, policy, or procedure that has had a meaningful impact on the outcome of the examination; or
  - b) Evidence of perceived prejudice or bias on the part of one or more examiners, or members of the Research and Scholarship Committee (RSC) involved in the original decision.
- Exclusion of Academic Judgment: Appeals based solely on a challenge to the academic judgment of the examiners or the RSC (i.e., disagreement with the

expert assessment of the research quality, methodology, or contribution) are not permitted and will be summarily dismissed.

### 3.6.2 Notice of Intention & Preliminary Assessment

- Candidate must notify the Director of Research and Scholarship (DRS) within 20 working days of receiving the examination outcome.
- The DRS will conduct a preliminary assessment to verify if the appeal is based on valid procedural grounds.
- If the appeal is based on academic judgment, the DRS will dismiss the case and provide a written explanation. If valid grounds exist, the DRS refers the case to the Chair of Academic Board who shall nominate and convene an Independent Appeals Panel (IAP) to investigate the matter.

### 3.6.3 Independent Appeals Panel (IAP)

- The IAP shall consist of:
  - a) The Deputy President (or nominee) as Chair; and
  - b) Two senior academic staff members with HDR supervision experience.
- To avoid conflict of interest and ensure impartiality, any person who was involved in the original examination outcome (including members of the RSC who made the initial decision), or who served as the candidate's supervisor or examiner, is strictly prohibited from serving on the IAP.
- The IAP will review all relevant documentation, including examiners' reports, RSC meeting minutes, and evidence provided by the candidate. The IAP may, at its discretion, interview relevant parties or request further information.

### 3.6.4 Determination and Finality

- The IAP shall submit its findings and recommendations to the Academic Board for endorsement. The recommendations may include:
  - a) Dismissing the appeal and upholding the original outcome; or
  - b) Upholding the appeal and directing a specific remedy (e.g., re-examination of the thesis or appointment of a new examiner).
- Following endorsement by the Academic Board, the recommendation of the IAP becomes the final internal outcome of the appeal process. Any member of the Academic Board who has a conflict of interest in the case must recuse themselves from the consideration of the matter.
- If the candidate remains dissatisfied with the conduct of the internal process, they may seek an external review through the Commonwealth Ombudsman or other relevant external bodies refer to the Student Complaints and Appeals Policy and Procedure.

### 3.6.5 Maintenance of Status and Rights during Appeal

- Throughout the internal appeal process, the candidate's enrolment status shall

be maintained. The candidate will continue to have access to Institute resources, including library services, IT facilities, and supervision, to ensure no academic disadvantage occurs while the appeal is pending.

- Lodging an appeal will not result in any disadvantage or prejudice to the candidate's ongoing studies or future relationship with the Institute.
- In accordance with the ESOS Act and the National Code, where the candidate is an international student: IMC will maintain the candidate's enrolment and will not take action to notify the relevant government department (e.g., Department of Home Affairs) of any change to the candidate's enrolment status until the internal appeals process is fully exhausted and the outcome is communicated. The candidate must continue to comply with their visa conditions during the appeal period.

#### 4 RELATED INTERNAL DOCUMENTS

- i. *Artificial Intelligence Policy*
- ii. *Conflict of Interest Policy*
- iii. *Higher Degree Research Assessment and Assessment Appeals Policy*
- iv. *Higher Degree, Research and Scholarships Committee Terms of Reference*
- v. *Higher Degree Research Confirmation of Candidature and Progression Review Policy and Procedure*
- vi. *Higher Degree Research Supervision Policy*
- vii. *Research Human Research Ethics Policy*
- viii. *Research Materials and Data Management Policy*
- ix. *Student Complaints and Appeals Procedure*

#### 5 VERSION CONTROL

Historical Version	Approved by	Approval Date
2026.05	Research and Scholarship Committee	12 May 2026
2024.11	Deputy President	20 November 2024
2019.08	Academic Board	14 August 2019
2015.10	Academic Board	22 October 2015

#### 6 STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP/MAINTENANCE

*The Research and Scholarship Committee oversees the implementation of and compliance with this Policy. For any enquiries or clarification, please contact [policy@imc.edu.au](mailto:policy@imc.edu.au).*

## Appendix A – Examiner’s Form



### PhD Final Submission Examination Assessment Form

#### Examiner Details

- Name: \_\_\_\_\_
- Institution: \_\_\_\_\_
- Position: \_\_\_\_\_
- Email: \_\_\_\_\_
- Date of Assessment: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Candidate and Thesis Details

- Candidate Name: \_\_\_\_\_
- Student Number: \_\_\_\_\_
- Thesis Title: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Detailed Feedback and Recommendations**

Please provide detailed comments regarding your assessment and specific recommendations for any required revisions (continue on a fresh page if required).

#### **Strengths**

#### **Areas Requiring Revision**

#### **Specific Recommendations**

## Overall Assessment

Based on the examination, I recommend that (select one):

- Award with no/minor amendments.** The thesis meets all requirements and can be awarded with no or minimal editorial changes.
- Requires minor revisions.** The final submission be classified as passed conditionally, subject to minor revisions, as outlined in my report.
- Requires major revisions.** The final submission requires correction due to deficiencies other than errors of presentation, but which are not of sufficient importance to warrant submission for re-examination.
- Revise and resubmit.** The final submission requires major, substantive amendment and submission for re-examination. My report provides detailed guidance to assist revision.
- Do not award the degree.** The final submission 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. My report provides detailed reasons for this decision, clearly outlining why revisions would not be sufficient.
- Allow revision and re-submission as a Masters by Research Thesis.** The final submission 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 could however be allowed to revise the thesis and re-submit the thesis for examination as a Masters by Research.

## Examiner's Declaration

I declare that I have no actual potential or perceived conflict of interest in examining this thesis and that my assessment is fair and impartial.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

For Office Use Only: Date Received: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B - Examination Template



### Assessment and Tracking Form

#### Candidate Details

- Name: \_\_\_\_\_
- Student Number: \_\_\_\_\_
- Thesis Title: \_\_\_\_\_
- Submission Date: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Examination Details

##### Examiner 1

- Name: \_\_\_\_\_
- Recommendation: \_\_\_\_\_
- Date Received: \_\_\_\_\_

##### Examiner 2

- Name: \_\_\_\_\_
- Recommendation: \_\_\_\_\_
- Date Received: \_\_\_\_\_

##### Examiner 3

- Name: \_\_\_\_\_
- Recommendation: \_\_\_\_\_
- Date Received: \_\_\_\_\_

##### Additional Examiner (if required)

- Name: \_\_\_\_\_
- Recommendation: \_\_\_\_\_
- Date Received: \_\_\_\_\_

## RC Assessment

Date of Assessment: \_\_\_\_\_

### Examination Outcome

Based on examiners' reports, the HDRSEC recommends:

- Award the degree with no amendments
- Award the degree subject to minor amendments
- Award the degree subject to major amendments
- Revise and resubmit for examination
- Allow revision and resubmission as Masters by Research
- Do not award the degree
- Appoint additional examiner
- Appoint external adjudicator

### Special Recognition

- Award PhD cum laude (requires unanimous recommendation from all examiners)

### Amendment Tracking (if applicable)

#### Minor Amendments

- Due Date (3 months from notification): \_\_\_\_\_
- Supervisor Approval Required: [ ] Yes [ ] No
- Amendments Completed Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Supervisor Sign-off Date: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Major Amendments

- Due Date (6 months from notification): \_\_\_\_\_
- Deputy President Approval Required: [ ] Yes [ ] No
- Amendments Completed Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Final Approval Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Revision and Resubmission

- Due Date (9 months from notification): \_\_\_\_\_
- New Principal Supervisor (if changed): \_\_\_\_\_
- Resubmission Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- New Examination Process Required:  Yes  No

**Conversion to Masters by Research**

- Candidate Accepted Conversion:  Yes  No
- New Submission Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- New Supervisor Assigned: \_\_\_\_\_
- MBR Requirements Provided to Candidate:  Yes  No

**Appeal Process (if applicable)**

- Appeal Received Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Grounds for Appeal: \_\_\_\_\_
- Academic Board Review Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Final Decision: \_\_\_\_\_

**Final Outcome**

- Decision: \_\_\_\_\_
- Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Award Conferred: \_\_\_\_\_

**Signatures:**

RSC Chair: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Deputy President: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_