

Higher Degrees by Research Thesis Examination - Guidelines

1. Purpose

1.1 University examination requirements are described in the

Higher Degrees by Research – Academic Policy

and the

Higher Degrees by Research Thesis Submission and Examination – Procedures

. These Guidelines provide thesis examiners with a synopsis of information provided in these documents, and with additional information to facilitate the examination process.

2. Scope and application

2.1 These guidelines apply to all stakeholders involved in the examinations of HDR theses.

3. Definitions

Please refer to the University's

Glossary of Terms for policies and procedures

4. Introduction

4.1 As per the

Higher Degree by Research – Academic Policy

, for the award of a Higher Degree by Research, the thesis or exegesis and creative work must represent a significant contribution to knowledge in the subject area.

4.2 Doctoral degrees

Doctoral degrees meet the Australian Qualifications Framework specifications at

Level 10

. UniSC's doctoral degrees are research degrees that require the candidate to make a substantial original contribution to knowledge through research, scholarship, and investigation in one or more fields of learning.

4.3 Research Master degrees

Research Master degrees meet the Australian Qualifications Framework specifications at

Level 9

RESPONSIBLE EXECUTIVE MEMBER

Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation)

DESIGNATED OFFICER

Manager, Graduate Research School

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. UniSC's Research Master degrees that require the candidate to apply an advanced body of knowledge to produce a significant contribution of merit through a program of advanced research in a scholarly field of learning, providing a pathway for further learning.

The thesis or exegesis and creative work is the sole requirement for the award of the degree and success, or failure is determined by the examination of the thesis alone.

5. Examination panel roles and responsibilities

The below table also appears in the Higher Degree by Research Thesis Submission and Examination- Procedures.

PANEL ROLE	NUMBER APPOINTED	DESCRIPTION
Chairperson of examination panel		<p>A staff member of this University with appropriate expertise in the research area (must not be or have been a member of the candidate's supervision panel).</p> <p>The chairperson does not have an examiner role (i.e. may not recommend additional revisions to the thesis outside those made by any of the original thesis examiners).</p> <p>The chairperson of the examination panel may be called upon by the Dean, Graduate Research to consider the reports provided by the external examiners and to make a recommendation on the outcome of the examination.</p> <p>In the event of examination outcome B, "Award with revisions", the Chairperson of the Examination Panel is required to review the revised thesis to determine whether all examiner's reports have been responded to appropriately, and to recommend whether the revised thesis should be accepted for award.</p>
External examiners	2 to 3	<p>Examiners hold a doctoral degree (or equivalent research experience), and must be an active researcher in the relevant discipline, as demonstrated by relevant and recent research publications.</p> <p>Examiners may not be members of the staff of this University (including adjunct appointments), nor have been a member of staff of this University within the past 5 years.</p> <p>A candidate's supervisors may not be examiners.</p> <p>Any persons acknowledged in the thesis as making a contribution to the work may not be appointed as an examiner.</p>
Reserve external examiner(s)	At least 1	

6. Conflict of Interest

6.1 Conflict of Interest

Conflicts of interest occur when one individual's personal, professional or other interests compromise their judgement or decision-making in their role. These can be potential, perceived or actual conflicts. All potential, perceived or actual conflicts of interest must be declared and reviewed by the Dean, Graduate Research. The existence of dual or multiple relationships between examiners, candidates, supervisors, industry partners, external advisors and the university have the potential to introduce bias and thus compromise independence in fact or in perception.

Thesis Examiners should refer to

Appendix 1 – Managing Interests Matrix

and consider whether any potential, perceived, or actual conflicts of interest exist.

6.2 Declaration Process

If a Staff Member or Thesis Examiner considers that a conflict of interest does exist, they should complete the Declaration of a Conflict of Interest Form (Appendix 2).

The Dean, Graduate Research will review the disclosure and determine whether the conflict of interest precludes the thesis examiner from participating in the examination, or whether the risk of conflict is low and can be mitigated.

An invitation to examine a HDR thesis may be withdrawn if the University concludes that there is any conflict of interest (including potential or perceived).

7. Confidentiality

7.1 Confidentiality of Thesis Examiner's Identity

Each Thesis Examiner is asked to indicate whether they wish to remain anonymous (to the supervisor and the candidate). If an examiner does not indicate whether or not they are willing to have their identity revealed to the candidate and or supervisor, their anonymity will be preserved.

7.2 Confidentiality of Thesis or Exegesis and Creative Work

It is inappropriate for any information contained in the thesis or exegesis and creative work to be referred to or extracted without the permission of the author. The thesis or exegesis is not a public document until it has been passed. In some cases, the thesis or exegesis will be temporarily embargoed following the examination process and will remain confidential during that period.

8. Thesis requirements

8.1 The University's thesis requirements are described in the€57

Higher Degrees by Research Thesis Format – Guidelines

9. Thesis Submission

As per the

Higher Degree by Research Thesis Submission & Examination - Procedures

, HDR Candidates are required to submit their thesis for examination by using the Thesis Submission online form in UniSC's candidate management system.

A PDF version of the thesis must be attached to the Thesis Submission online form.

Before being sent for external examination, the Thesis Submission online form will be reviewed by the Principal Supervisor and the Dean, Graduate Research School.

When the Thesis Submission online form is approved by the Dean, Graduate Research and processed by the Graduate Research School the HDR Candidate's consumption of candidature will be suspended.

10. Revised Thesis Submission

As per the

Higher Degree by Research Thesis Submission & Examination – Procedures

, HDR Candidates are required to submit their revised thesis for examination by using the appropriate online form in UniSC's candidate management system.

Candidates who received Outcome B) Award with revisions or Outcome C) Revise and Resubmit for External Examination must submit:

TABLE 0.5

Qty

Electronic .pdf version of the revised thesis or exegesis

1

Electronic .doc version of the revised thesis or exegesis with Tracked Changes visible

2

Thesis Revisions Summary Report (1 report for each examiner)

Before the revised thesis can be sent for revised examination, the online submission form will be reviewed by the Principal Supervisor and the Dean, Graduate Research School.

When the online submission form is approved by the Dean, Graduate Research and processed by the Graduate Research School the HDR Candidate's consumption of candidature will be suspended.

11. Examination materials

11.1 The Graduate Research School provides members of the examination panel with:

- An electronic copy of thesis (or exegesis and creative artefact)
- A copy of the Thesis Revisions Summary Reports (in the case of revised thesis submission)
- Higher Degree by Research Theses Examiners – Guidelines (this document)
- Higher Degree by Research Theses Format– Guidelines
- Examiners' Report Form
- Honorarium Payment Claim Form - Domestic thesis examiner
- Honorarium Payment Claim Form - International thesis examiner

12. Thesis examination

12.1 Timeframe for examination

Examiners are expected to take up to six (6) weeks to examine a doctoral thesis or four (4) weeks to examine a master by research thesis and must return their examiner's report to the Graduate Research School. If it is not possible to complete the examination within this time frame please contact the Graduate Research School so that the candidate and supervisors can be kept informed of the examination progress.

12.2 Communication between examiners

As per the

Higher Degree by Research Thesis Submission & Examination – Procedures,

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members of the examination panel may not normally consult with one another. An examiner wishing to enter into dialogue with another examiner, a supervisor, a candidate or the chairperson of examination panel, should direct any request to the Dean, Graduate Research (via deangraduateresearch@usc.edu.au). A supervisor or candidate may not initiate contact with an examiner or chairperson of examiners.

12.3 Examiners' report

Each examiner is required to submit a detailed independent report together with a completed summary recommendation form. Examiners are asked to address both the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis or exegesis and creative work and to provide detailed comments about the overall quality of the thesis or exegesis and creative work, paying attention to things such as:

- The extent to which the candidate has shown familiarity with, and understanding of, the relevant literature and field of study;
- The extent to which the candidate has demonstrated critical insight and capacity to carry out independent research;
- The extent to which the candidate has developed and addressed a set of logically coherent hypotheses;
- The appropriateness of the methods used;
- Independence of thought and approach;
- Coherence of argument and organisation;
- The literary quality of the thesis as a whole;
- Whether the data analysis is technically correct and congruent with modern approaches in the field;
- Whether the results are presented in a form and style that meets widely accepted standards of publications in high impact journals appropriate to the discipline;
- The extent of the contribution to knowledge made by the research;
- The potential of the research for publication;
- Whether the thesis constitutes a sufficiently comprehensive investigation of the topic that meets international standards for the proposed award.

12.4 Examination outcomes

As per the

Higher Degree by Research Thesis Submission and Examination – Procedures

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Examiners select from one of the following outcomes for the overall thesis. In addition to the recommendation for outcome, detailed comments are requested to explain and support your recommendation (i.e. which the candidate will respond to for recommended outcomes b, c or e, or which will support a recommendation for outcome d).

(A) AWARD	THE THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS SATISFACTORY AND THE CANDIDATE AWARDED THE DEGREE.
(b) Award with revisions	The thesis be accepted as satisfactory and the candidate awarded the degree, subject to revisions as listed being made by the candidate to the satisfaction of the Chairperson of the Examination panel.
(c) Revise and resubmit for external examination	The thesis in its present form is not satisfactory and further work as described in the examiner's reports is required. The revised thesis should be subject to external examination.
(d) Non-Award	The thesis does not merit the award of the degree and does not demonstrate sufficient merit to warrant re-submission. The thesis be rejected and the degree not awarded.
(e) [For doctoral examinations only] Non-Award doctoral, award Master	The candidate be admitted to the award for an appropriate alternative degree at the Master level (with revisions as listed being made by the candidate to the satisfaction of the Chairperson of the examination panel).

Please note - Option (c) above is not available when examining a Revised Thesis as a thesis can only be revised and re-examined once.

Where there is substantial disagreement between the external examiners about the recommendation for the final outcome of the examination, the Dean, Graduate Research may:

- Seek input from the Chairperson of Examiners towards making a final decision; or
- Approve that an additional external examiner be appointed (to examine the thesis to provide an additional external examiner's recommendation to inform the final outcome).

In both cases, the next available reserve external examiner originally nominated will be invited to fulfil these roles if required.

Communication schedule between the Graduate Research School and the Thesis Examiners is outlined in table 0.5:€57

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TABLE 0.5

	Action taken
2 weeks before due date:	2 weeks prior to the due date, the Examiner is reminded of the upcoming due date.
On due date:	The Examiner is reminded that their report is due.
2 weeks after the due date:	The Graduate Research School sends reminder to Examiner that report is overdue. The Graduate Research School communicates the delay to the Principal Supervisor who in turn advises the Candidate
3 weeks after the due date (if no reply, or significant delay is reported):	The Graduate Research School notifies the Dean, Graduate Research. The Graduate Research School communicates the delay to the Principal Supervisor who in turn advises the Candidate
Upon receipt of advice from the DGR:	If it is agreed that the report will be unacceptably delayed, upon direction from the Dean, Graduate Research, the Graduate Research School advises the Examiner that their services are no longer required and requests the return of the thesis. The Graduate Research School invites the Reserve Examiner to examine the thesis

13. Honorarium

The University of the Sunshine Coast values examiner contributions and appreciates that thesis examination takes a significant amount of time. External examiners are entitled to an honorarium commensurate with Universities Australia rates.

Payment claim documentation is provided above (in Section 11).

14. Outcome advice to Examiners

Examiners will be advised of the final outcome of the process as soon as possible after the conclusion of the examination process, including a hyperlink to the final thesis in the UniSC Research Bank.

Appendix 1

Extract from the

Australian Council of Graduate Research Conflict of Interest in Examination Guidelines

Listed below are examples of different types of conflict of interest that may arise between the examiner and various stakeholders including the candidate, the supervisor/advisor, the University, the subject matter itself and another examiner. The list is indicative and is not to be considered exhaustive.

• CONFLICT WITH THE CANDIDATE

Working relationship

A1	Examiner has co-authored a paper with the candidate in the last five years	MAJOR
A2	Examiner has worked with the candidate on matters regarding the thesis e.g. previous member of the advisory team	MAJOR
A3	Examiner has employed the candidate or been employed by the candidate within the last five years	MAJOR
A4	Examiner is in negotiation to directly employ or be employed by the candidate	MAJOR
A5	Examiner has acted as a referee for the candidate for employment	MAJOR

Personal relationship

A6	Examiner is a known relative of the candidate	MAJOR
A7	Examiner is a friend, associate or mentor of the candidate	MAJOR
A8	Examiner and the candidate have an existing or a previous emotional relationship of de facto, are co-residents or are members of a common household	MAJOR

Legal relationship

A9	Examiner is or was married to the candidate	MAJOR
A10	Examiner is legally family to the candidate (for example, step-father, sister-in-law)	MAJOR
A11	Examiner is either a legal guardian or dependent of the candidate or has power of attorney for the candidate	MAJOR

Business, Professional and/or Social Relationships

A12	Examiner is currently in or has had a business relationship with the candidate in the last five years (for example, partner in a small business)	MAJOR
A13	Examiner is in a social relationship with the candidate, such as co-Trustees of a Will or god-parent	MAJOR

A14 Examiner has a current professional relationship, such as shared membership of a Board or Committee (including editorial and grant decision boards), with the candidate MAJOR

A15 Examiner has had personal contact with the candidate that may give rise to the perception that the examiner may be dealing with the candidate in a less than objective manner MINOR

B. Conflict with the Supervisor/Advisor

Working Relationship

B1. Examiner was a candidate of the supervisor within the past five years MAJOR

B2. Examiner has co-supervised with the supervisor in the past five years MAJOR

B3. Examiner holds a patent with the supervisor granted no more than eight years ago and which is still in force MAJOR

B4. Examiner had directly employed or was employed by the supervisor in the past five years MAJOR

B5. Examiner holds a current grant with the supervisor MAJOR

B6. Examiner has co-authored a publication with the supervisor in the past five years MAJOR

Personal Relationship

B7. Examiner is in negotiation to directly employ or be employed by the supervisor MAJOR

B8. Examiner is a known relative of the supervisor MAJOR

B9. Examiner and the supervisor have an existing or a previous emotional relationship of de facto, are co-residents or are members of a common household MAJOR

Legal Relationship

B10. Examiner is or was married to the supervisor MAJOR

B11. Examiner is legally family (for example, step-father, sister-in-law) to the supervisor MAJOR

B12. Examiner is either a legal guardian or dependent of the supervisor or has power of attorney for the supervisor MAJOR

Business, Professional and/or Social Relationships

B13.	Examiner is currently in or has had a business relationship with the supervisor in the last five years (for example, partner in a small business or employment)	MAJOR
B14.	Examiner is in a social relationship with the supervisor, such as co-Trustees of a Will or god-parent	MAJOR
B15.	Examiner has a current professional relationship, such as shared membership of a Board or Committee (including editorial and grant decision boards), with the supervisor	MINOR
B16	Examiner has had personal contact with the supervisor that may give rise to the perception that the examiner may be dealing with the candidate in a less than objective manner	MINOR

C. CONFLICT WITH THE UNIVERSITY

Working Relationship

C1.	Examiner is currently in negotiation with the University for a work contract (other than examining thesis)	MAJOR
C2.	Examiner is currently working for the University pro bono (for example, on a review)	MINOR
C3.	Examiner has examined for the University two or more times in the past 12 months and/or five or more times in the past five years	MINOR

Other Relationship

C4.	Examiner has received an Honorary Doctorate from the University within the past five years	MAJOR
C5.	Examiner graduated from the University within the past five years	MAJOR
C6.	Examiner has/had a formal grievance with the University	MAJOR

Professional Relationship

C7.	Examiner is a current member of staff or has a current Honorary, Adjunct or Emeritus position with the University or has had such a position during the candidature of the candidate or in the past five years	MAJOR
C8.	Examiner has a current professional relationship with the University (for example, membership of a Board or Committee)	MINOR
C9.	Examiner has a current Visiting position with The University or has had such a position during the candidature of the candidate or in the past five years	MINOR

D. CONFLICT WITH THE SUBJECT
MATTER

Research

D1. Examiner has a direct commercial interest in the outcomes of the research MAJOR

E. CONFLICT WITH OTHER
EXAMINERS

Working Relationship

E1. Examiner works in the same department/school as another examiner MAJOR

Personal Relationship

E2. Examiner is married to, closely related to, or has a close personal relationship with another examiner MAJOR

Professional Relationship

E3. Examiner has a professional relationship with another examiner MINOR

Appendix 2

HDR Thesis Examiner's Conflict of Interest Declaration form (coming soon).

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