

Examiners of Higher Degrees by Research Theses - Guidelines



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Introduction

University of the Sunshine Coast 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.

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.

Doctoral degrees

Doctoral degrees meet the Australian Qualifications Framework specifications at Level 10. USC'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.

Research Master degrees

Research Master degrees meet the Australian Qualifications Framework specifications at Level 9. USC'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.

1. Examination panel roles and responsibilities

PANEL ROLE	NUMBER APPOINTED	DESCRIPTION
Chairperson of examination panel		<p>Normally 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 examination panel may be called upon by the Research Degrees Committee to consider the reports provided by the external examiners and to subsequently make a recommendation to the Research Degrees Committee on the outcome of the examination.</p> <p>In the event of examination outcome B, "Award with revisions", the Chairperson of Examiners 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>

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Any persons acknowledged in the thesis as making a contribution to the work may not be appointed as an examiner.

Reserve external examiner(s)	At least 1	The reserve examiner(s) may be called upon by the Research Degrees Committee to fulfil the role of examiner (in the event that any of the originally nominated examiners are unavailable), or should an additional or adjudication examiner be required (see section 5, Examination Outcomes a and b)
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2. Thesis requirements

University of the Sunshine Coast thesis requirements are described in the HDR Thesis Presentation – Guidelines.

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3. Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality

Conflict of Interest

Each examiner is asked to disclose any apparent, potential or actual conflict of interest prior to accepting the invitation to examine a HDR thesis. Definition of apparent, potential or actual conflict of interest is in accordance with the Australian Research Council's Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Policy.

Conflict of Interest is a situation in which an examiner has competing professional or personal interests. Such competing interests could make it difficult for an examiner to fulfill his or her duties impartially and potentially could improperly influence the performance of their official duties as an examiner.

An apparent or perceived conflict of interest exists where it appears that an examiner's private or professional interests could improperly influence the performance of their duties and responsibilities whether or not this is, in fact, the case. Examiners must be conscious that perceptions of conflict of interest may be as important as an actual conflict, as this could jeopardise the University's reputation for quality and impartial examination processes.

A potential conflict of interest arises where an examiner has a private or professional interest that might lead to an actual or perceived conflict of interest either currently or in the future.

In determining whether there is a possible conflict of interest, the following should be taken into consideration:

- Examiners must not have worked at this University within the past five years
- Examiners should not have had involvement in the candidate's research. External independent reviewers of a candidate's confirmation of candidature may not normally be appointed as examiner of the same candidate's subsequent HDR thesis.
- Examiners must not be a co-author on any part of the candidate's work for this assessment
- Examiners must declare any relationship (including research collaborations and co-authorship) with the Supervisor. The declaration must include the list of co-authored papers and grant collaborations (include years and details of collaboration(s))
- Examiners must not have had substantial interaction with the candidate or supervisor in any other circumstance that might jeopardise the independence of the examination
- Examiners must not have a close personal relationship with the candidate or supervisors
- Examiners should be free from bias for or against the candidate or supervisor
- Other (examiner to advise and disclose perceived conflict of interest)

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

Confidentiality of Identity

Each examiner is invited to indicate whether he or she wishes to remain anonymous with respect 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.

Confidentiality of Thesis or Exegesis and Creative Work

Examiners are reminded that 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.

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4. Examination materials

The Graduate Research Office provides members of the examination panel with:

- An electronic copy of thesis

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- Examiners of Higher Degree by Research Theses – Guidelines (this document)
- Higher Degree by Research Theses Presentation – Guidelines
- Examiners' Report Form

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5. Thesis examination

Timeframe for examination

Examiners are expected to take up to six weeks to examine the thesis and must return their examiner's report to the Graduate Research Office. If it is not possible to complete the examination within this time frame please contact the Graduate Research Office so that the candidate and supervisors can be kept informed of the examination progress.

Communication between examiners

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 Chair - Research Degrees Committee (via the Graduate Research Office at researchtraining@usc.edu.au). A supervisor or candidate may not initiate contact with an examiner or chairperson of examiners.

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.

Examination outcomes

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 your 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 resubmission. 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).

For the examination of a thesis revised and submitted for re-examination, option (c) above is not available 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 Research Degrees Committee 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.

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6. 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 will be provided with the thesis materials.

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7. 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 USC Research Bank.

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