



Higher Degrees by Research (HDR) Assessment procedure

Section 1 - PREAMBLE

- (1) This Procedure is effective from 26 November 2021.
- (2) This Procedure includes the following schedules:
 - a. [Schedule A: Thesis Examination Requirements for Specified Masters Degrees](#)
 - b. [Schedule B: Oral Examination](#).

Section 2 - PURPOSE

- (3) To outline the procedure for assessment of higher degrees by research (HDR).

Section 3 - SCOPE

- (4) This Procedure applies to the University's HDR courses. It does not apply to degrees by coursework or higher doctoral degrees.

Section 4 - POLICY

- (5) This Procedure is pursuant to the [Higher Degrees by Research \(HDR\) policy](#).

Section 5 - PROCEDURE

- (6) HDR students are assessed as follows:
 - a. a thesis, examined in accordance with the processes set out in this Procedure and which may include an oral examination according to [Schedule B: Oral Examination](#), or alternative processes for masters degrees specified in [Schedule A: Thesis Examination Requirements for Specified Masters Degrees](#)
 - b. any mandatory coursework components, assessed according to the requirements of the [Assessment \(Higher Education Courses\) procedure](#).

Thesis submission

- (7) Written components of the thesis must be in English.
- (8) The candidate should not include highly confidential, sensitive or personal material in the thesis.

(9) The form of the thesis will be appropriate to the discipline and, where not already included in the definition in clause 64, will be approved by the Chair of the Thesis Examination Committee.

(10) The principal supervisor must inform Deakin Research at least three months before the examination if the examination includes an exhibition or performance.

(11) Students may include externally-published work in their thesis. Where these publications include authors in addition to the student, the student must identify their own contribution to the work and complete an Authorship Statement.

(12) Any part of a thesis submitted for another award must be identified and should not be considered as part of the thesis.

(13) Thesis material presented via the internet (such as the development of a web page) must be in a form which does not enable modification during the examination process.

(14) Students must provide notice of their intention to submit their thesis for examination using Deakin's HDR examination system.

(15) Students must prepare their written thesis component for examination in accordance with the format, content, word limits and other requirements prescribed by the Graduate Research Academy. The written thesis component must be accompanied by a report from mandated software for detecting breaches of academic integrity.

(16) The thesis must be approved as ready for submission by the principal or executive supervisor and the Head of Academic Unit or nominee. The Graduate Research Academy must approve the administrative requirements of the thesis.

(17) The thesis must be accompanied by a signed declaration by the student certifying that it complies with all research requirements.

(18) Students are wholly responsible for the content and submission of the thesis for examination.

Thesis submission without supervisor approval

(19) Students may apply to submit their thesis for examination despite any advice from their principal or executive supervisor that it is not ready for submission. In such a case, the student, supervisor and the Head of Academic Unit will be notified via the online examination system of further actions required under clauses 16-17.

(20) Within one week of notification under clause 14 the student and the principal or executive supervisor must each make a 1-2 page written case to the Head of Academic Unit explaining why they believe the thesis is or is not ready for submission and examination.

(21) Within two weeks of the written cases being submitted, the Head of Academic Unit will establish a committee of three staff comprising:

- a. the Head of the Academic Unit or nominee (Chair),
- b. the HDR Coordinator or nominee and
- c. one other staff member with experience in the field of research and in the supervision and examination of Australian HDR theses.

The Head of Academic Unit will take reasonable steps to ensure that committee members have no conflict/s of interest.

(22) The committee considers the two written cases and the submitted thesis. Within two weeks of receipt of the

written cases the Chair of the committee must provide a brief written statement to the student and supervisor recommending that:

- a. the thesis will be accepted for examination in its current form; or
- b. additional work must be completed to bring the thesis to an assessable standard.

(23) If the committee determines that the thesis be examined against the recommendation of the supervisor, the committee will be responsible for nominating examiners, normally within four weeks of the recommendation.

(24) If additional work must be completed, the thesis must be approved as ready for examination by the committee Chair prior to it being submitted again using the online examination system.

Selection of examiners

(25) After receipt of a notification of intent to submit the thesis, or where new examiners are required according to clauses 40 or 45, the principal or executive supervisor will nominate at least four examiners who will meet the following requirements:

- a. have international standing in the field of research and be currently active in research according to the standards of their discipline
- b. be independent of the conduct of the research and have no close association with the student or the candidature
- c. be competent to undertake the assessment and have experience in HDR examination
- d. be impartial and have no conflict of interest
- e. be external to the University and not have worked at or graduated from Deakin in the last five years or been employed at an institution at which any of the student's external/research supervisors are based, or at which the student has spent part or all of their candidature
- f. have a doctoral qualification or equivalent
- g. at least two of the examiners reside outside Australia. Where this is not possible, an explanation will be provided in writing to the Chair of the Thesis Examination Committee who will make a decision whether or not to accept fewer than two examiners from outside of Australia.

(26) Where four experienced examiners at the required level cannot be found, up to one examiner without experience of examining at the level of the degree being sought may be nominated.

(27) The Head of Academic Unit will approve the nomination of examiners.

(28) Students may submit a statement to the Thesis Examination Committee via the relevant HDR Coordinator giving reasons why a specified person ought not to be appointed as an examiner.

(29) The Chair of the Thesis Examination Committee or nominee will appoint at least three independent and appropriately qualified external examiners, selected from the four nominated by the Head of the Academic Unit.

(30) All communication with the appointed examiners about the examination must be undertaken by the Graduate Research Academy or, where appropriate, the Chair of the Thesis Examination Committee.

(31) The names of examiners (or any adjudicator/s appointed according to clause 42) are not released to the student until after a decision on the examination outcome has been determined, and subject to the agreement of the examiners or adjudicator/s, unless the oral examination process applies.

Thesis examination

(32) The examiners will assess the thesis.

(33) Examiners will provide a written assessment of the thesis in accordance with a form approved by the Pro Vice-Chancellor Researcher Development which specifies relevant standards and criteria consistent with the [Higher Education Standards Framework \(Threshold Standards\) 2021](#) including that the thesis demonstrates an original contribution to knowledge. For a doctoral student, this contribution must be significant. Examiners will recommend one of the outcomes specified in clause 47.

Determining the outcome of the thesis examination

(34) Where an oral examination is not required, the Head of the relevant Academic Unit will consider examiners' reports from the examination of the thesis and, in consultation with the principal or executive supervisor, make a recommendation on the outcome of the examination according to clause 47 to the Thesis Examination Committee.

(35) Where an oral examination is required and has taken place, the panel, via the Panel Chair, will make a recommendation on the outcome of the examination according to clause 47 to the Thesis Examination Committee.

(36) The Thesis Examination Committee will consider the examiners' reports, and recommendation of the Head of the relevant Academic Unit or Panel Chair of the oral examination panel and determine an outcome according to clause 47 based on those reports. The Committee is not obliged to follow the recommendation of the Head of Academic Unit or Panel Chair.

(37) At least two examiners must support the thesis at the level of the degree being sought before the Thesis Examination Committee can pass the examination, although this does not guarantee that the thesis will be passed. For students enrolled in a doctoral degree, where the thesis does not make sufficient contribution for a doctoral degree but fulfils the criteria for the passing of an examination for a masters degree, it must have the support for this by at least two examiners.

(38) If consistent reports are received from two examiners, and

- a. the Head of Academic Unit recommends that the examination be passed
- b. the third examiner's report is more than six weeks overdue

then the Thesis Examination Committee is not required to wait for the third examiner's report and may (but is not obliged to) proceed to make a decision on the outcome.

(39) If further reports are provided after the Thesis Examination Committee decision but prior to the submission of the library copy of the thesis, the report will be provided to the student in addition to those which have been provided already. The report may be used in making any revisions required but is not considered in determining the outcome of the examination.

(40) The Thesis Examination Committee may, in exceptional cases, set aside one or more of the examiner/s recommendation/s on any of the following grounds where, in its view:

- a. the examiners' reports, considered together, do not provide a clear recommendation
- b. one or more of the recommendation/s is not supported by the written report/s of the examiner/s
- c. there is a procedural irregularity, conflict of interest, or bias by an examiner/s against the student or the content of thesis.

In this case, the report/s may be dismissed by the Committee, and where necessary a new examiner or under clause 42, adjudicator appointed.

(41) An examiner's recommendation or report can only be set aside by a quorate meeting of the Thesis Examination

Committee.

Adjudication

(42) Where the Thesis Examination Committee determines to set aside the recommendation of one or more of the examiners, it may appoint an adjudicator in consultation with the Head of the Academic Unit to advise on the process or outcome of the examination. The adjudicator must be an expert in the field of the thesis and satisfy the requirements of clauses 25b.

(43) The Head of Academic Unit will advise the student and their principal or executive supervisor that an adjudicator is being appointed. The advice will be delivered in person, or by video or other electronic means where face-to-face meeting is not possible.

(44) The adjudicator will be provided with a copy of the thesis as submitted for examination (or both versions in the case of a re-examination) and all examiners' reports with the examiners' names removed where possible. The adjudicator will not provide an additional examiner's report, but will evaluate the existing examiners' reports and recommendations and make a recommendation to the Thesis Examination Committee as to the process or outcome of the examination.

(45) Where the thesis is to be re-examined and one or more of the original examiners are unable to re-examine or their reports have been set aside, the adjudicator may nominate a pool of new examiners who meet the criteria in clauses 25-26. The new examiners will be nominated and selected from this pool by the Chair of the Thesis Examination Committee.

(46) Following adjudication, the examination outcome will be made by majority of a quorate Thesis Examination Committee. The Committee is not bound to follow the recommendation of the adjudicator.

Outcomes of thesis examination

(47) The Thesis Examination Committee will determine the outcome of the examination. The Graduate Research Academy will advise the student in writing and provide copies of the examiners' reports and the recommendation of the Head of Academic Unit. The outcome will be one of the following:

- a. Outcome 1: The examination is passed
- b. Outcome 2
 - i. Outcome 2.1: Pass subject to minor revision. The examination is passed provided that the minor revisions identified in the examiners' reports are corrected to the satisfaction of the Head of Academic Unit
 - ii. Outcome 2.2: Pass subject to major revision. The examination is passed provided that the major and other revisions identified in the examiners' reports are addressed to the satisfaction of the Head of Academic Unit
- c. Outcome 3: the examination is not passed but the student be permitted to revise the thesis in response to the examiners' reports and present it for re-examination.
- d. Outcome 4 (not applicable to masters degrees)
 - i. Outcome 4.1: the thesis does not make sufficient contribution for a doctoral degree but fulfils the criteria for the passing of an examination for a masters degree.
 - ii. Outcome 4.2: the thesis does not make sufficient contribution for a doctoral degree but fulfils the criteria for the passing of an examination for a masters degree provided that the revisions identified in the examiners' reports are undertaken to the satisfaction of the Head of Academic Unit.
- e. Outcome 5: the examination is not passed.

(48) The Head of Academic Unit will advise the student and their principal supervisor where an outcome of 4 or 5 is determined. The advice will be delivered in person, or by video or other electronic means where a face-to-face meeting is not possible.

Revision and re-examination

(49) If the Thesis Examination Committee determines that a thesis is to be re-examined, the student will be limited to one re-examination. The student will resubmit full, revised thesis by the deadline set by the Graduate Research Academy, which will normally be no later than 12 months after the student is notified of the results from the first examination.

(50) Where a thesis is re-examined, the re-submitted thesis will be sent to the examiner/s making the request for re-examination or to new examiner/s where the original examiner/s' is unable to act or the original examiner/s report have been set aside. New examiners will be appointed in the usual way except where nominated by an adjudicator according to clause 45. The replacement examiner/s will be sent only the revised version of the thesis, and will not be sent the prior examiners' reports.

(51) The examination may be passed if the thesis has the support of two examiners through the combined first examination and re-examination processes.

(52) There is no option for further examination unless:

- a. there is cause to set aside an examiner/s' report/s according to clause 40, or
- b. there is a major procedural irregularity in the process, or
- c. a new examination is required according to clauses 60 or 61.

Lodgement of final thesis after examination

(53) The final thesis must conform to the University's requirements as prescribed by the Graduate Research Academy.

(54) Students are required to submit an electronic copy of the final thesis with the Graduate Research Academy through the online HDR examination system for lodgement with the University Library.

(55) Students are expected to allow access to their entire thesis via [Deakin Research Online](#). Students may apply to the Librarian to limit access to the thesis citation, abstract and metadata only and if approved, the Library will make individual digital copies available for consultation, loan and limited copying in accordance with the [Copyright Act 1968 \(Cth\)](#).

Restriction of access

(56) The student may apply to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research or nominee to defer publication or restrict access to a thesis for a limited period of time to facilitate the commercial exploitation of material or for other compelling reasons. The application must state reasons for the request and the period for which access is to be restricted.

Recommendation for the degree

(57) The Head of the Academic Unit will confirm that the student has met the course learning outcomes that are not demonstrated by the thesis.

(58) Following lodgement of the final thesis, the Graduate Research Academy will provide the examination outcome and Head of Academic Unit confirmation to the Research and Research Training Committee. The Committee will recommend students who have successfully completed both the thesis examination process and all other assessable course requirements to Academic Board for award of the relevant degree.

Thesis integrity

(59) Where an allegation of breach/es of research integrity occurs during or after the thesis examination process, the matter will be heard according to the [Research Integrity Breaches procedure](#).

(60) Where an allegation of breach/es of research integrity occurs during an examination before the outcome is determined, the Chair of the Thesis Examination Committee may cancel the examination.

(61) Where an allegation of breach/es of research integrity is not supported and:

- a. the allegation was made during the examination, a new examination will occur
- b. the allegation was made after the examination, no further action is needed.

(62) Where an allegation/s of breach/es of research integrity during or after the thesis examination is supported and correction of the thesis is required according to the [Research Integrity Breaches procedure](#), the thesis will be corrected by the student with the support of the supervisor or appropriate expert and approved by the Head of Academic Unit and will proceed as follows:

- a. where the allegation/s occurred during the examination and the student is allowed to continue in the course, a new examination of the corrected thesis will take place
- b. where the allegation/s occurred after the outcome of the examination has been decided but prior to the award of the degree, the matter will be referred to a quorate meeting of the Thesis Examination Committee which will decide whether the corrected thesis should be assessed through a new examination or whether the outcome of the examination is confirmed.
- c. where the allegation/s occurred after the degree had been awarded, the matter will be referred to a quorate meeting of the Thesis Examination Committee which will decide whether the award of the degree is confirmed or recommend to Council that the degree be rescinded.

Appeals

(63) A student may appeal the decision of the Thesis Examination Committee to the University Appeals Committee on one or more of the following:

- a. procedural irregularities in the examination process
- b. documented evidence of prejudice or bias in the examination process.

(64) Appeals by students rejecting the academic assessment of the merit of their work are not permitted.

(65) The appeal must be lodged in writing within 20 working days of being notified of the examination outcome according to the [Student Appeals procedure](#).

Section 6 - Definitions

(66) For the purpose of this Procedure:

- a. Academic Unit: as defined in the [Research Conduct policy](#).
- b. Graduate Research Academy: the central administrative body responsible for the management of higher degree by research candidature.
- c. Head of Academic Unit nominee: a senior member of Academic staff who is qualified as a principal supervisor.
- d. Higher Degrees by Research (HDR): as defined in the [Higher Degrees by Research \(HDR\) policy](#)

- e. Thesis: the major assessable research outputs presented for examination that demonstrate a student's original contribution to knowledge, which is substantial for doctoral students. The thesis, may include materials and formats such as performances, creative works, folios or electronic media appropriate to the discipline, as well as publications and prior publications. A thesis may be in the form of (but is not limited to):
- i. a 'conventional' written thesis
 - ii. a thesis by papers/publications
 - iii. a thesis by prior publications
 - iv. a creative work plus exegesis
 - v. a creative work by prior publications
 - vi. a folio

Status and Details

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Responsible Executive	Julie Owens Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation
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