

HDR Examination Procedures

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1. Governing Policy

[Higher Degrees by Research Policy](#)

2. Purpose

These procedures set out the requirements for selection and engagement of examiners for higher degree by research (HDR) theses, the examination process, consideration of Examiner Reports, and finalisation of HDR awards.

3. Examiners

3.1. Number of examiners

- a. Two examiners must be engaged for all HDR candidatures.
- b. Examination arrangements for Cotutelle degrees are as specified in the Cotutelle Agreement.

3.2. Criteria for selection of examiners

Examiners must:

- a. be free from real or perceived bias, either for or against the student, the supervisors, each other and the University
- b. be research-active experts of international standing in the discipline, to ensure their knowledge of the field or area of professional practice is current
- c. hold a qualification equivalent to or higher than the degree for which the thesis is being examined
- d. have empathy with the theoretical framework used by the student
- e. not be from the same institutions
- f. be external and independent of Flinders University and not have any real, potential or perceived conflicts of interest with the student, the supervisor(s), the other examiner(s) or the University, of either a personal, professional or commercial nature. [Examiners who have had a close personal or professional relationship with any supervisor or the student in the previous five years, for example co-publication, grants and/or supervision, and recent graduates from Flinders University, are regarded as not being external and/or independent.], and
- g. only act as an examiner for a Flinders University HDR thesis once in a period of two years.

3.3. Selection, engagement and confidentiality of examiners

- a. Examiners are approved by the Dean of Graduate Research, following nomination by the student's Principal Supervisor and College HDR Coordinator. Potential examiners must meet the criteria specified in Procedure 3.2, unless specified otherwise in a Cotutelle Agreement.
- b. In the case of a Cotutelle candidature, examiners must also be approved by the other institution at which the student is enrolled, unless specified otherwise in the Cotutelle Agreement.
- c. Examiners must be kept confidential from the point of nomination by the Principal Supervisor. Once the examination process is finalised, examiner names may be released to the student, provided the examiner gives permission.
- d. The selection and engagement process is as follows:

Principal Supervisor	<ol style="list-style-type: none">i. Immediately after the Final Thesis Review Milestone:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• consult with the student on whether there are any persons the student would object to acting as an examiner for any reason, and consider those objections when selecting potential examiners• consider the field of potential examiners who meet the criteria specified in Procedure 3.2, and• email those selected to determine their willingness to examine, and their availability within the required timeframe, without committing the University to their engagement as examiners. Retain the emails for submission with the Nomination Form.ii. At least 3 months before the due date for submission of the student's thesis, nominate two examiners, who have indicated they would accept an examiner's role, to the Office of Graduate Research via Inspire.iii. Remind the student that they are not permitted to know the identity of examiners, and that any attempt by the student to identify and/or contact any potential examiner will potentially invalidate the examination process.
Dean of Graduate Research	<ol style="list-style-type: none">iv. Review the nominated examiners, seeking advice as the Dean deems appropriate, and approve their engagement if satisfied they meet the criteria specified in Procedure 3.2.

Office of Graduate Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> v. Once the examiners have been approved, formally engage the examiners and provide them with the thesis (except as per vi. below) and the information they will need to complete their task, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the degree requirements as stated in the Course Rule • for Cotutelle candidatures, information about the examination arrangements and other relevant parts of the Cotutelle Agreement • information about examiner confidentiality and the release of Examiner Reports to students, as per Procedure 3.3.3 • a statement prohibiting examiners of the same thesis consulting with each other during the examination process • information about the process that will apply if there is significant divergence between Examiner Reports, as per Procedure 4.8 • the Examiner Report form • the deadline for submission of the completed Examiner Report (six weeks), and • information on the honorarium payable for the examination. vi. If intellectual property agreements related to the thesis are in place, delay sending the thesis to the examiners until the examiners complete and return a Thesis Examiners' Confidentiality Disclosure Agreement. vii. If an approved examiner is sent a letter of engagement and is unable to accept, or does not acknowledge receipt in a timely manner, request a new nomination from the supervisor.
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4. Examination process

4.1. Submission of thesis

- a. To be eligible for examination, a thesis must be submitted in the format prescribed in the [HDR Thesis Rules](#).
- b. Submission occurs by uploading the thesis into the University's thesis examination digital repository with:
 - i. a copy your thesis in .pdf format, a text-matching report and, if applicable, any additional files and your co-authorship permissions via [Inspire](#)
 - ii. an electronic text-matching software report (except where text-matching is explicitly precluded by the terms of a Government or third party agreement which applies to the research, and an exemption application is approved by the Dean of Graduate Research), and
 - iii. a certification from the Principal Supervisor (except where Procedure 4.2. applies) that, in the supervisor's judgment, the thesis is of a standard to meet the requirements for award of the degree.
- c. Once the thesis is uploaded and approved for submission for examination, the student's enrolment status will be changed to "Under Examination" as specified in the [HDR Admission and Enrolment Procedures](#).

4.2. Supervisor does not support submission

- a. A student may not submit a thesis for examination against the advice of the supervisor(s) unless an attempt has been made to resolve the matter through discussion with the supervisor(s) and with either an HDR Contact Officer or the College HDR Coordinator.

- b. If the matter is not resolved under 4.2.a., the student may submit without supervisor(s) support, and the following process will apply:
- i. If the Examiners Nomination Form has been submitted via [Inspire](#) to the Office of Graduate Research before the breakdown in the student/supervisor relationship (the date of which will be determined by the HDR Contact Officer or College HDR Coordinator following the discussion under 4.2.a.), the nominated examiners will be used, subject to engagement under Procedure 3.
 - ii. If no Examiners Nomination Form has been submitted via [Inspire](#) to the Office of Graduate Research before the breakdown, the Office will ask for examiners to be nominated by the College HDR Coordinator, who may draw on the expertise of the University HDR Committee or other staff in the relevant discipline.
 - iii. The HDR Coordinator will discuss the breakdown with the supervisors to ascertain the level of supervisor involvement post examination, and will then make appropriate arrangements for the final stages of the examination on a case-by-case basis according to the circumstances, and advise the Office of Graduate Research.
 - iv. The student must be kept informed and the HDR Coordinator must be copied into all correspondence about the student's case.

4.3. Thesis examination responsibilities

Office of Graduate Research	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. On receipt of the thesis in the digital repository: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. check that the thesis complies with the University's prescribed requirements ii. notify the student that it has been received, and iii. forward the thesis and relevant documentation to the engaged examiners. b. If an examiner requests a printed thesis for examination, the Office of Graduate Research will notify the student. It is then the student's responsibility to print the thesis and provide it to the Office of Graduate Research, which will courier the thesis to the examiner. c. Deal with any enquiries from examiners, in consultation as appropriate with the Dean of Graduate Research, the student, a supervisor, HDR Coordinator or, on the advice of the student or supervisor, another suitably qualified person. d. Actively monitor examiner deadlines, follow up missed deadlines, and determine requests for extensions to deadlines. e. If an examiner fails to meet approved deadlines within three months of thesis submission, and no extensions have been approved, cancel the examiner's engagement, and ask the Principal Supervisor to nominate a new examiner, and apply Procedure 3.3. f. Once two Examination Reports are received, activate the consideration process under Procedures 4.4-4.8.
Student	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> g. Ensure there is no attempt to identify or communicate with the examiners or potential examiners.
Supervisors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> h. Ensure there is no communication with the examiners on any matter related to the examination. Any examiner enquiries must be directed to the Office of Graduate Research.

4.4. Examiner Report requirements

- a. In examining the thesis, each examiner must judge the student's demonstration of the thesis requirements specified in the relevant [Course Rules](#).
- b. An examiner of a thesis must submit a written report (minimum of one page) on the prescribed [Examiner Report](#) form via Inspire about the quality of the thesis and its strengths and weaknesses.

- c. The report must:
- i. indicate whether the examiner would recommend the thesis for the [Vice-Chancellor's Award for Doctoral Thesis Excellence](#), and
 - ii. recommend one of the following as the outcome of the thesis examination (as per Table 1 of the [Higher Degrees by Research Policy](#) reproduced below):

A: Award: that the degree be awarded, subject to satisfying any coursework requirements (if applicable).

B: Award: that the degree be awarded, subject to the completion of *minor* amendments to the thesis (as specified by the examiner), and subject to satisfying any coursework requirements (if applicable).

Minor amendments may include the correction of spelling or typographical errors and small changes to the text.

C: Award: that the degree be awarded, subject to the completion of *major* amendments to the thesis (as specified by the examiner), and subject to satisfying any coursework requirements (if applicable).

Major amendments are those where the examiner determines that the thesis is sound but changes to the structure and/or substance of some chapters of the thesis would improve it.

D: Revise and resubmit: that the degree not be awarded but the student be permitted one opportunity to revise and resubmit the thesis for re-examination.

E: Award alternate degree: that, where the thesis submitted is for the degree of PhD or Professional Doctorate, an appropriate Masters degree or designated exit award be awarded, subject to any minor or major amendments to the thesis (as specified by the examiner).

F: Non Award: that the degree not be awarded and the student not be allowed to present for the degree again.

4.5. Consideration of Examiner Reports

- a. After receiving both Examiner Reports, the outcome of the examination will be determined as per Procedures 4.6 to 4.8. [For Cotutelle candidatures, these procedures may be varied by the Cotutelle Agreement.]
- b. All determinations to award the degree are subject to Procedure 5.
- c. After the Dean of Graduate Research's determination, the student will be provided with copies of the Examiner Reports via [Inspire](#), including recommended amendments (with the anonymity of an examiner preserved if this has been requested by the examiner or is required under the Procedures set out below).

4.6. Examiner Report recommendations same or similar

Recommendations of 2 examiners	Determination	Consequential actions	
A + A	Dean of Graduate Research determines on award of the degree.	Office of Graduate Research	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Notify student and Principal Supervisor. ii. Notify the student of remaining requirements for award of the degree under Procedure 5.2.
A + B A + C	Dean of Graduate Research determines on award of the degree, subject to completion	Office of Graduate Research	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Notify student and Principal Supervisor.

Recommendations of 2 examiners	Determination	Consequential actions	
B + B B + C C + C	of amendments to the satisfaction of the supervisor, the College HDR Coordinator and the Dean of Graduate Research within the required time (see Procedure 5.1)	Student	ii. Make amendments in accordance with Procedure 5.1.
D + D	Dean of Graduate Research determines that thesis is to be revised and resubmitted. Due date for resubmission set in consultation with the Principal Supervisor and the student, taking into account the scale of revisions required and whether the re-activated student is full-time or part-time.	Office of Graduate Research	i. Update the student's enrolment status in the degree course. [RTP Fee Offset (domestic students) and tuition fee liabilities (international students) will resume. International students may require a new Confirmation of Enrolment for the duration of the revisions, which may require the student to apply for a new student visa.]
		Student	ii. Revise the thesis, in accordance with the Examiner Reports and by the new due date. iii. Resubmit the thesis in accordance with Procedure 4.1. iv. Apply for any time extension or intermission in accordance with the HDR Admission and Enrolment Procedures . v. Note that a thesis may be resubmitted for examination only once.
		Dean of Graduate Research	vi. Determine whether there are any circumstances warranting submission of revised thesis to go to new examiners, rather than the original examiners. vii. If so, approve and engage new examiners, in accordance with Procedures 3.2 and 3.3, informing them that a D recommendation is not an option.
		Office of Graduate Research	viii. Arrange for thesis to be re-examined as per Procedure 4.3.
E + E	Dean of Graduate Research determines on award of a specified Masters by	Office of Graduate Research	i. Notify student and supervisors.

Recommendations of 2 examiners	Determination	Consequential actions	
	Research degree to a PhD student, or an appropriate designated exit award to a Professional Doctoral student, subject to any thesis amendments required by the examiner/s.	Student	ii. Make amendments in accordance with Procedure 5.1.
F + F	Dean of Graduate Research determines that the degree not be awarded and that student not be allowed to present for the degree again.	Office of Graduate Research	i. Notify the student and supervisors.

4.7. Award of PhD for Masters by Research thesis

- a. Where both examiners, independently and unsolicitedly, consider that a thesis submitted for the award of Masters by Research is of such merit that they recommend the degree of PhD be awarded instead, the Dean of Graduate Research will consider the recommendation.
- b. If approved, the Office of Graduate Research will inform the student and the supervisors, and notify the student of the remaining requirements for award of the higher degree under Procedure 5.2.

4.8. Examiner Report recommendations divergent

Where examiners are not unanimous in making any one recommendation, i.e.

A + D or E or F

B + D or E or F

C + D or E or F

D + E or F

E + F

the following process applies. The student will be kept regularly informed on the progress of the examination process by the Office of Graduate Research.

Office of Graduate Research	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Provide copies of Examiner Reports via Inspire to student and Principal Supervisor (without identifying examiners to student). b. Invite Principal Supervisor to write a statement.
Principal Supervisor	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> c. In consultation with student, write a formal diagnostic statement on the discipline specificities and the contextual challenges that led to the examination outcome, within 10 working days, and submit to the Office of Graduate Research.
University HDR Committee	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> d. Consider the Examiner Reports and the Principal Supervisor's Statement together. e. Decide: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. whether an outcome can be determined on the basis of the material before the committee, or ii. whether a third examiner should be engaged to examine the original thesis, and the examination consideration process postponed until the third examiner report is received. f. In the case of the first option (e.i.):

- i. make a determination to:
 - award the degree (**A**, **B** or **C**), with amendments as specified by the examiner/s if required
 - require the thesis to be revised and resubmitted (**D**)
 - award an alternate degree (**E**), or
 - not award the degree (**F**).
- ii. For determinations **A**, **B**, **C**, **E** and **F**, the appropriate Consequential Action specified in Procedure 4.6 will apply.
- iii. For determination **D**, the Consequential Action specified in Procedure 4.6 will apply, except that:
 - two new examiners will be engaged to examine the revised and resubmitted thesis
 - the new examiners will not be provided with the student's previously examined thesis, or the previous examiners' reports, and
 - the new examiners will not be permitted to make a **D** recommendation.
- iv. Once the new Examiner Reports are received, determine the outcome, on the basis of the new reports only, under Procedure 4.6 (if the reports are the same or similar) or under Procedure 4.8 (if the reports are divergent).
- g. In the case of the second option (e.ii.), after the third examiner's Examiner Report has been received, consider all the Examiner Reports and the Principal Supervisor's Statement together, and make a determination as per f. above.
- h. Where a third examiner or two new examiners are required, they will be engaged in accordance with Procedures 3.2. and 3.3., and the Examination Process specified under Procedure 4.3 will apply.
- i. If, in the University HDR Committee's view, exceptional circumstances exist, the committee may vary this process.

4.9. Complaint of a breach of research integrity

- a. If, at any time during the examination process, a complaint is made that the thesis is in breach of the [Research Integrity Policy](#), the complaint will be dealt with under the [Breach of Research Integrity Procedures](#).
- b. Where a determination is made that there is a breach, but it is not Research Misconduct and it does not apply to a substantial component of the thesis, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) may refer the complaint for action by the Dean of Graduate Research under these procedures.
- c. The Dean of Graduate Research will determine:
 - i. that the student be permitted to revise the thesis and continue with the examination, or
 - ii. that the student be permitted to revise and resubmit the thesis for re-examination by the same examiners, or
 - iii. that the student be permitted to revise and resubmit the thesis and engage two new examiners to examine the revised thesis in accordance with Procedures 3.2 and 3.3.
- d. To make this determination the Dean of Graduate Research may convene a sub-committee of the University Higher Degrees by Research Committee to provide advice on the matter.
- e. Procedure 4.3, and Procedures 4.4 to 4.9 will be applied.

5. Award

5.1. Thesis amendments

- a. Amendments required following a **B**, **C** or **E** determination must be completed within three months of notification of outcome, unless a longer period is negotiated by the Principal Supervisor and approved by the Office of Graduate Research.
- b. The maximum extension permissible is six months from date of notification of outcome.
- c. If amendments are not submitted by the approved due date the candidature can be withdrawn by the Office of Graduate Research.
- d. Amendments must be reviewed by the Principal Supervisor **and** the College HDR Coordinator, who must certify via [Inspire](#) that the amendments have been completed to their satisfaction.
- e. Once the prescribed form is received, the Dean of Graduate Research will review the amendments. If the Dean of Graduate Research is satisfied with the amendments, the Office of Graduate Research will notify the student of the remaining requirements for award of the degree under Procedure 5.2.
- f. If the Dean of Graduate Research is not satisfied with the amendments, the student and Principal Supervisor will be notified and asked to commence the amendment process again.

5.2. Award requirements

- a. Following a determination to award the degree after the thesis examination and the acceptance of any amendments to the thesis, the Dean of Graduate Research will certify that the student has qualified for the award of the degree, provided the student has:
 - i. satisfied all coursework requirements (if applicable), and
 - ii. uploaded into the [University Library's digital thesis repository](#) a digital copy of their thesis which will serve as the authoritative version. The thesis must be:
 - uploaded in accordance with Library requirements
 - in its final version following examination, and amendments (if necessary)
 - consistent with copyright law, and
 - in an open access format unless exempted under an approved embargo (see Procedure 5.3).
- b. The Office of Graduate Research will notify the student of the award and of degree conferral procedures.

5.3. Thesis open access

- a. The thesis uploaded into the Library's digital thesis repository is the authoritative version of the thesis, and will be available in perpetuity for open access, unless an embargo to restrict access is approved.
- b. During the uploading process, a student can apply to the Dean of Graduate Research for an embargo for a period of up to 3 years from the date the University approved the award of the degree.
- c. Applications will only be approved on the grounds that:
 - i. the thesis contains confidential and/or sensitive material
 - ii. it was a condition imposed by the owner of private records and material used by the author
 - iii. the author was in an employment or other contract relationship with a third party that made the restriction a condition of the contract, or
 - iv. the thesis contains creative, critical, academic or equivalent material where open access would compromise a likelihood of publication, performance or equivalents.
- d. Not more than 2 months before the end of an approved embargo period, a student may apply for a further embargo.

- e. Except in extraordinary circumstances, the maximum period of embargo that will be approved is 4.5 years.

6. Posthumous Award of Degree

If at any time during the examination process a student dies, the University will consider awarding the degree posthumously. The following process will apply:

- a. The Principal Supervisor will notify the Dean of Graduate Research and the HDR Examinations Coordinator, Office of Graduate Research, that the student has died, advise of any special circumstances, personal or cultural sensitivities or considerations to be taken into account and review and implement the [Management of Personal and Work-Related Material for Deceased Students and Staff and those on Sudden and Extended Absences procedures](#).
- b. If both Examiner Reports contain A recommendations (**A + A**), the degree will be awarded posthumously.
- c. If the recommendations of the Examiner Reports are any one of the following combinations:
 - A + B**
 - A + C**
 - B + B**
 - B + C**
 - C + C**—the Dean of Graduate Research will seek advice from the Principal Supervisor and determine whether the requested amendments are within the deceased student's demonstrated capacity to amend the thesis to the standard required.
- d. Where the Dean of Graduate Research makes a determination that the amendments are within the deceased student's demonstrated capacity, the Principal Supervisor will amend the thesis in line with the examiners' recommendations, ensuring that the thesis remains primarily the student's work by:
 - i. recording the changes with track changes
 - ii. making amendments only as additional explanatory sentences, and
 - iii. including a notation in the final thesis outlining the contribution made by the supervisor.
- e. The amended thesis will be submitted to the Dean of Graduate Research who will make a recommendation to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) on the award of the degree.
- f. If the Examiner Reports contain any **D**, **E** or **F** recommendations a posthumous degree will not be awarded.

7. Reviews and appeals against examination determinations

- a. Students who receive any one of the following examination determinations may request a review of the determination in accordance with the [Student Review and Appeal Policy](#) and procedures:
 - i. A determination made by the University HDR Committee following divergent Examiner Reports under Procedure 4.8.
 - ii. An **E** determination (award an alternate degree)
 - iii. An **F** determination (non-award)
 - iv. A determination where the student provides documented evidence of a flaw in the examination process, such as prejudice or bias on the part of one or more examiners.
- b. A student who is dissatisfied with the outcome of the review may appeal to the Student Appeals Committee, if specified grounds are met, in accordance with the [Student Review and Appeal Policy](#) and procedures.

- c. If the reviewer or Student Appeals Committee decides in favour of the student, they may determine that two new examiners be engaged to re-examine the thesis, in which case Procedures 3 and 4 will be applied.

8. Authorities

Delegate	Authority
a. HDR Thesis Rules	
Dean of Graduate Research	Approve the <i>HDR Thesis Rules</i>
b. Examination and determination	
College HDR Coordinator	Approve a student whose enrolment has lapsed submitting a thesis for examination
Dean of Graduate Research	Approve the engagement of thesis examiners
Dean of Graduate Research	Determine award of the degree when Examiner Reports have the same or similar recommendations
University HDR Committee	Determine award of the degree when Examiner Reports have divergent recommendations
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)	Determine award of the degree posthumously
Dean of Graduate Research	Certify whether a student has qualified for award of the degree
c. Final thesis restricted access	
Dean of Graduate Research	Approve an embargo or restricted access to a final thesis for a specified period of time

9. Supporting documents and forms

[HDR Thesis Rules](#)

Forms—

HDR students see: [HDR Examination Forms](#)

HDR supervisors see: [HDR examination for examiners and supervisors](#)

External examiners see: [Exam information for HDR examiners](#)

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* Unless otherwise indicated, this procedure will still apply beyond the review date.

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