Higher Degrees by Research Policy

Section 1 - Summary

(1) Victoria University (VU) offers a number of Higher Degrees by Research, or Research Degrees. The University has principles and procedures that provide the framework for the admission, enrolment, progression, support and examination of students and candidates in Research Degrees at VU to ensure that Research Degrees are delivered fairly, transparently and efficiently.

Section 2 - TEQSA/ASQA/ESOS Alignment

(2) HESF: Standard 1.1 Admission; 1.4 Learning Outcomes and Assessment; 4.1 Research; 4.2 Research Training; 5.2 Academic and Research Integrity; 7.2 Information for Prospective and Current Students.

(3) ESOS Act: Part 3 Division 2; Part 5 Division 2. National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018 – Standard 2, 3, 8 and Standard 9.

Section 3 - Scope

(4) This Policy applies to all students and candidates enrolled in Higher Degrees by Research (HDR) programs.

Section 4 - Definitions

(5) Higher Degree by Research (HDR)

Section 5 - Policy Statement

(6) VU is committed to developing a vibrant and flourishing research culture. One of the mechanisms to achieve this is by offering Research Degrees.

(7) A Research Degree, or Higher Degree by Research, is a postgraduate course in which the major part of the assessment must be in the form of reporting the outcomes of a research project/s conducted as the research component of the degree. The Research Degree may also include a Coursework Component, which is one or more accredited units of study designed to address an area(s) of content and/or skill development within the HDR program. (Information on the Research component and any Coursework Component is provided in the Higher Degree by Research Procedures).

(8) All research undertaken as part of a Research Degree, or Higher Degree by Research, must adhere to the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2018) (Cth).

Admission to a Research Degree

(9) Admission refers to:

a. the provisional acceptance and enrolment in the pre-candidature phase of a Research Degree (clause (22));
b. the official acceptance into a Research Degree resulting from the:
    i. granting of advanced Candidature pertaining to the relevant procedures for information on Advanced Candidature);
    ii. reinstatement of Candidature (clause (21)).

Academic Eligibility for Admission

(10) Admission to a Research Degree occurs when an applicant:

a. meets minimum academic entry and English language requirements and demonstrates experience and capacity to meet the demands of the course; or
b. can demonstrate exceptional academic achievement via the Australian Quality Framework (AQF) levels or international equivalence standards sufficient to undertake the appropriate degree level.

(11) Minimum academic requirements and the method used to determine capacity and exceptional ability to meet the demands of the course are outlined in the Higher Degrees by Research Admissions Procedure.

Admission to a Research Degree is Dependent on University Capacity

(12) Admission to a research degree is subject to the University having the resources and capacity (including, but not limited to, supervisors and infrastructure) to support the student or candidate and the proposed program of Research (see clause 13).

Enrolment

Research Degree Students and Candidates must be Enrolled for the Duration of the Research Degree.

(13) A student or candidate admitted to a Research Degree must enrol and maintain their enrolment in the Research Degree for the duration of the Research Degree.

(14) A student or candidate's enrolment will 'Lapse' if they do not maintain their enrolment during the course of the Research Degree.

(15) To be admitted and enrol, a candidate must complete the requirements and processes outlined in the Higher Degrees by Research Enrolments Procedure.

Mode of Study

(16) The time fraction of enrolment (that is, full time or part time) can be varied to cater for changing circumstances provided that this does not conflict with eligibility requirements for residence in Australia, receipt of living stipend scholarship or availability of Research Training Program (RTP) places. The process to request changes is outlined in the Higher Degrees by Research Enrolments Procedure.

Enrolment not required during Thesis Examination

(17) Candidates do not need to maintain their enrolment whilst their Thesis is being examined.

Discontinuation of Enrolment

(18) Discontinuation refers to:

a. the termination of a student or candidate's enrolment in a Research Degree by the University. The University may discontinue a student or candidate's enrolment because of:

i. Unsatisfactory progress and/or Misconduct, including academic or research misconduct (see Student Misconduct Procedure, Research Integrity - Guide to the Management of Potential Breaches of the Australian Code Procedure and Academic Integrity Policy); or,
ii. failure to pay debts to the University or make arrangements for a deferral payment (refer to the Enrolments Procedure);
iii. Unavailability of supervision (refer to Higher Degrees by Research Supervision Procedure)

b. where a student or candidate enrolled in a Research Degree elects to completely terminate their enrolment in a Research Degree. To discontinue, the student or candidate must complete the requirements and processes outlined in the Higher Degrees by Research Enrolments Procedure.

Leave of Absence from Enrolment

(19) Leave of Absence is when a candidate suspends their enrolment in a Research Degree for a period of time. An enrolled candidate is entitled to apply for a leave of absence for a period or periods up to 12 months within the limits of timely duration of the relevant degree. Additional periods of leave of absence will only be granted in exceptional circumstances and within the timely duration of the relevant degree.

(20) Where a candidate takes a leave of absence, the period of leave of absence is not counted in their Research Degree duration. In seeking leave of absence, the candidate must fulfil and follow the relevant requirements and provisions outlined in the Higher Degrees by Research Enrolments Procedure.

Reinstatement of Candidature

(21) Candidates who have:

a. discontinued from their degree within three years;
b. allowed their enrolment to Lapse;

may apply to have their enrolment reinstated within three years of their last enrolment. The relevant process and requirements are detailed in the Higher Degrees by Research Enrolments Procedure.

The Phases of Higher Degrees by Research: Pre-Candidature and Candidature

(22) The structure of a Research Degree is marked by two phases, known as "Pre-candidature" (students) and "Candidature" (candidate). Information on Pre-Candidature and Candidature is available in the Higher Degrees by Research Pre-Candidature and Candidature Procedure.

Course Duration

Timely Duration of Higher Degrees by Research

(23) The timely duration of a Research Degree will depend on the Research Degree in which the candidate is enrolled. Information on Timely Duration for the various Research Degrees is in the Higher Degrees by Research Pre-Candidature and Candidature Procedure.

Extensions beyond Timely Duration of the Research Degree

(24) If a candidate reaches the Timely Duration for their Research Degree, a further application will need to be submitted requesting additional time to complete their Thesis. Details on requirements and processes for seeking an extension are outlined in the Higher Degree by Higher Degrees by Research Pre-Candidature and Candidature Procedure.

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Conversion between Course Type and Level

(25) Conversion of a Research Degree refers to changing enrolment from a:

a. Doctoral Degree to a Master Research Degree;
b. Professional Doctoral to a PhD.

(26) Conversion of a Research Degree can be initiated by the candidate or directed by the University. The process for conversion and other provisions relating to conversion are outlined in the Higher Degrees by Research Pre-Candidature and Candidature Procedure.

The Thesis

What is a Thesis?

(27) A Thesis is a submission that documents the context, process and outcomes of a candidate's research presented in a format accepted for submission for examination. It should be interpreted in the disciplinary context and may vary according to discipline and/or field of study and should adhere to the Academic Integrity Policy.

(28) Information on thesis formats and the requirements associated with each type of Research Degree are outlined in the Higher Degrees by Research Thesis Requirements Procedure.

Thesis Examination

(29) Candidates are required to submit their thesis for examination. In all cases, examination of the thesis will be undertaken by at least two (2) examiners external to the University. The provisions, process and requirements for examination are outlined in the Higher Degrees by Research Submission, Examination and Classification Procedure.

Progress

(30) Research Degree candidates will have their Progress and the quality of their research regularly monitored. The Higher Degrees by Research Pre-Candidature and Candidature Procedure outline the mechanisms, requirements and other information regarding Progress.

Unsatisfactory Progress

Unsatisfactory Progress Proceedings

(31) Candidates found to have met the requirements for Unsatisfactory Progress will be subject to Unsatisfactory Progress proceedings. The process and requirements for Unsatisfactory Progress Proceedings are specified in the Higher Degrees by Research Progress Procedure.

Review of Unsatisfactory Progress Decisions

(32) Candidates who consider that the Unsatisfactory Progress decision is not consistent with prescribed grounds of the Student Appeals Regulations 2019 may lodge an appeal through the University's Appeals process with 20 University business days of the decision.

Supervision

(33) Supervision refers to the process of mentoring and guiding the academic and professional development of a Higher Degree by Research candidate by a registered Research supervisor(s). Candidates' supervision will operate in accordance with relevant University policies relating to supervision of research degree.

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Research and Professional Development

(34) Candidates undertaking a Research Degree will be provided with academic and professional development opportunities and support by the University to facilitate their research training program and the dissemination of their research findings. The Higher Degrees by Research Researcher Development and Support Procedure outlines the researcher development and support available.

Infrastructure and Facilities

(35) The University will provide HDR Candidates with research and other infrastructure, facilities and other general resources and support in accordance with national standards for their approved program of research. The standards and other requirements are outlined in the Higher Degrees by Research Pre-Candidature and Candidature Procedure and Space Allocation and Management Procedure.

Classification and Conferral of Research Degrees

(36) The candidate may only be classified and conferred with the degree in which they were enrolled in.

(37) The processes and requirements associated with Classification and Conferral are outlined in the Higher Degrees by Research Submission, Examination and Classification Procedure.

Section 6 - Procedures

(38) Higher Degrees by Research Admissions Procedure

(39) Higher Degrees by Research Enrolments Procedure

(40) Higher Degrees by Research Pre-Candidature and Candidature Procedure

(41) Higher Degrees by Research Progress Procedure

(42) Higher Degrees by Research Researcher Development and Support Procedure

(43) Higher Degrees by Research Supervision Procedure

(44) Higher Degrees by Research Thesis Requirements Procedure

(45) Higher Degrees by Research Submission, Examination and Classification Procedure

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Glossary Terms and Definitions

"Higher Degree by Research (HDR)" - A Higher Degree by Research (HDR) is a postgraduate award at Master or Doctoral level at AQF 9 or 10 respectively, of which two thirds or more is research and research training. The major part of assessment of these courses must be in the form of reporting the outcomes of a research project/s conducted as the research component of the degree. A HDR may also include a coursework component, which is one or more accredited units of study designed to address and area(s) of content and/or skill development within the HDR program.

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