

Higher Degrees by Research Procedure 8 Thesis Requirements

Section 1 - Summary

(1) This Procedure outlines the components and requirements of a Higher Degree by Research (HDR) thesis.

Section 2 - Accountability

Accountable/Responsible Officer	Role
Accountable Officer	Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research
Responsible Officer	Dean, Graduate Research

Section 3 - Scope

(2) This Procedure applies to domestic and international candidates and University staff administering this Procedure.

Section 4 - Definitions

(3) Maximum duration - Represents the amount of time for which Commonwealth funding is provided for candidates undertaking a HDR program at a particular level.

Section 5 - Policy Statement

(4) [Higher Degrees by Research Policy](#)

Section 6 - Procedures

Part A - Summary of Roles and Responsibilities

Roles	Responsibilities
Office for Researcher Training, Quality and Integrity	Provide appropriate advice and webpage links regarding thesis requirements to the candidate and supervisors.

Part B - Components of a Higher Degree by Research

(5) Victoria University (VU) offers a number of research degrees for which a thesis is the major component of assessment. These include Masters by Research degrees, the Doctor of Philosophy degree (PhD), the PhD (Integrated) and Professional Doctorates.

(6) The thesis may take the form of a standard written work, or may be submitted in an alternative thesis format. Alternative theses may include appropriate creative arts projects, or a thesis by publication that includes published and publishable papers with linking and framing material.

(7) Regardless of the discipline and presentation format, the research undertaken and the depth of knowledge demonstrated in the thesis must satisfy the requirements for each degree as outlined below.

(8) In addition to meeting the academic requirements of the degree, graduates are expected to acquire a range of generic skills and attributes. Whilst these attributes apply to all candidates, doctoral candidates are expected to acquire these skills at a more advanced level than Masters by Research candidates. This expectation reflects the difference between Level 10 and Level 9 as outlined in the [Australian Qualifications Framework](#) (AQF).

Part C - Broad Thesis Requirements by HDR Degree

Master of Applied Research, Master of Research and Master of Research Practice

(9) This degree has the objective of training the candidate in the application and critical evaluation of research methods and methodology by the conduct of a specified program of research under appropriate supervision. In accordance with the AQF Level 9 requirements, the thesis for the Master of Applied Research, Master of Research and Master of Research Practice is expected to be no more than 50,000 words (and usually in the range of 25-50,000 words).

(10) A Master of Applied Research, Master of Research and Master of Research Practice degree is awarded after external examiners are satisfied that the candidate has demonstrated:

- a. a thorough understanding of the relevant techniques in the field of research by both a thorough review of the literature and application of the techniques;
- b. competence in the chosen field through judicious selection and application of methods to yield a significant body of work;
- c. capacity to critically evaluate and effectively present this body of work.

Masters by Research

(11) This degree has the objective of training the candidate in the application and critical evaluation of research methods and methodology by the conduct of a specified program of research under appropriate supervision. In accordance with the AQF Level 9 requirements, the thesis for a Masters by Research degree is expected to be no more than 60,000 words (and usually in the range of 30-60,000 words) and typically takes one to two years Effective Full Time (EFT) to complete, depending on the entry level and disciplinary background of the applicant.

(12) A Masters by Research degree is awarded after external examiners are satisfied that the candidate has demonstrated:

- a. a thorough understanding of the relevant techniques in the field of research by both a thorough review of the literature and application of the techniques;
- b. competence in the chosen field through judicious selection and application of methods to yield a significant body of work;

- c. capacity to critically evaluate and effectively present this body of work.

Doctor of Philosophy

(13) The Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree provides training and education in research under appropriate supervision, with the objective of producing researchers capable of conducting research independently at a high level of originality and quality. A doctoral candidate should uncover or create new knowledge by the discovery of new information, formulation of theories, development of new approaches, or the innovative re-interpretation of existing ideas, theories or approaches.

(14) A PhD thesis is expected to equate to a sustained piece of written work of no more than 100,000 words in length (and normally between 60-100,000 words). VU does not discriminate between the PhD or the PhD (Integrated) for the purposes of examination.

(15) A Doctor of Philosophy degree is awarded after external examiners are satisfied that the candidate has demonstrated:

- a. a deep and thorough understanding of the relevant techniques in the field of research;
- b. competence in the chosen field through judicious selection and application of methods to yield a significant body of work;
- c. capacity to critically evaluate and effectively present this body of work;
- d. independence of thought and approach;
- e. an original contribution to knowledge in the field.

PhD (Integrated)

Year One Thesis

(16) During the first year of the PhD (Integrated), candidates are expected to submit a Year 1 Thesis (12000-15000 words) for internal examination. The standard to be achieved for the Year One Thesis is AQF 9.

Professional Doctorates

(17) The professional doctorate is a research degree that focuses on the issues and problems of a particular profession. It includes up to one third of assessed work as coursework, which supports the development of the thesis.

(18) This degree has the objective of developing the candidate as a professional able to conduct research into their professional field at a high level of originality and quality. The professional doctorate provides education, training and development to assist candidates to uncover new information or insight within their professional area.

(19) The degree offers structured learning and independent supervised study that produces significant and original research outcomes. It may be more focused than a PhD with the outcome of the work having more specific consequences.

(20) A professional doctorate thesis is expected to equate to a sustained piece of written work. In accordance with the AQF, the University expectations regarding the length of time taken to complete a professional doctorate is three years EFT (36 months), with the possibility of applying for two 6-month extensions to candidature. The maximum duration is 48 months.

(21) A professional doctorate is awarded after examiners are satisfied that the candidate has demonstrated:

- a. a thorough understanding of the relevant techniques in the field of research;
- b. competence in the professional area through judicious selection and application of methods to yield a

- significant body of work;
- c. capacity to critically evaluate and effectively present this body of work;
- d. independence of thought and approach;
- e. an original contribution to knowledge or practice within the profession.

Part D - Detailed Thesis Requirements

Thesis Titles

(22) All thesis titles must:

- a. be a clear description of the research project;
- b. be concise, containing no more than 150 characters on the spine of the thesis;
- c. be in sentence case with only the first letter of the significant words capitalised;
- d. refrain from using abbreviations or acronyms wherever possible.

(23) Thesis titles are considered provisional until candidature has been confirmed. Where there has been a change of title from that which was approved at confirmation of candidature, candidates must report the change and the reasons for it on the [Release of Thesis form](#) at the time of submission. Minor amendments to the thesis title can be made at classification.

Thesis Format

(24) Thesis format at VU can fall into one of three categories:

- a. Traditional (Research Masters or Doctoral level);
- b. Creative (Research Masters or Doctoral level);
- c. Publication (Doctoral level only).

(25) The proposed thesis format is approved through the confirmation of candidature process.

(26) A change from traditional thesis format to an alternative thesis format post-confirmation of candidature is only possible for PhDs (AQF10).

(27) A change to thesis format post confirmation of candidature must be declared at the time of thesis submission on the [Release of Thesis form](#).

Basic Thesis Requirements

(28) The University specifies the following in regard to the presentation of the research thesis:

- a. the text must be typed on A4-sized paper at either double, or one and a half spacing;
- b. the recommended font size is 11 or 12. Common fonts used are Times New Roman and Arial;
- c. diagrams, tables etc should be placed so that they can be seen at the same time as the text to which they refer. Diagrams should not be grouped together at the end of each chapter. Each diagram must carry both a number and a caption. If this is inconvenient, or does not meet with the discipline's conventions, as a general rule, tables should stand as near as possible to the text to which they refer;
- d. all pages must be numbered;
- e. there must be a minimum margin of three centimetres on the left and right side of each page;
- f. the thesis must contain an abstract of no more than 500 words summarising the context and purpose of the research project, method of analysis used and major conclusions drawn;

- g. the thesis must include a comprehensive acknowledgements section as it is crucial that all who have contributed to the formation of the thesis are appropriately acknowledged for their contributions, including anyone who has been involved in proofreading and editing or in other ways contributing to the work, such as previous supervisors;
- h. the thesis should be presented in a logical and concise manner, in a format which conforms to the relevant disciplinary length expectations, and normally being:
 - i. 25-50,000 words for a Master of Applied Research, Master of Research and Master of Research Practice;
 - ii. 30-60,000 words for a Masters by Research thesis;
 - iii. 45-65,000 words for a Doctorate of Business Administration thesis;
 - iv. 50-60,000 words for a Doctorate of Education thesis;
 - v. 60-100,000 words for a PhD thesis;
 - vi. equivalent to the above in another approved thesis format for the degree, as per Clauses (29) to (47) in this procedure, such as Thesis by Creative Project or Thesis by Publication.
- i. the word limit for each degree includes quotes, but excludes tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes;
- j. if the word limit is below or beyond the amount specified for the degree, then at the time of submission of the thesis, a letter from the Principal Supervisor must accompany the thesis stating the length and explaining why the thesis is below or above the normally expected word limit and justifying the length in relation to practice in its field;
- k. in cases where the maximum word limit is exceeded, the supervisor must also contact the examiners and obtain clearance that they are willing to review a thesis of this length. The letter accompanying the thesis must make reference to contact made and approval sought from the proposed examiners. Candidates whose thesis exceeds the maximum word limit for the degree that they are submitting for examination must state the number of words of their thesis in their signed [declaration of authenticity](#) (see Clause 28h);
- l. the thesis must have a title page showing the title of the thesis, the degree for which it is submitted, the full name of the candidate, the year of submission, and VU;
- m. there must be a comprehensive table of contents;
- n. all theses must include a signed [declaration of authenticity](#). Theses submitted for examination that do not include this signed declaration of authenticity will not be accepted for examination;
- o. additional declarations as per Clause 46 in this procedure are mandatory for theses presented in the Thesis by Publication format and must be included in the thesis submission for the thesis to be accepted for examination;
- p. references should be listed at the end of the thesis before the appendices.

Thesis by Creative Project

(29) In this format the thesis comprises a substantial creative project and is presented in the format of one or more creative works in the candidate's chosen medium/media (referred to as the Creative Component) and an accompanying critical reflective written piece (referred to as the Analytical Written Component or Exegisis).

(30) These components are examined together as an integrated whole constituting the original and substantial contribution to knowledge required of research candidates. The balance between the Creative Component and the Analytical Written Component is negotiated at the outset of candidature between the supervisor and the candidate and approved by the relevant Deputy Director, Flagship Research Institute/Centres (or nominee).

(31) The thesis abstract in this format outlines the nature, scope and intent of the Creative Component. The abstract must provide a brief description that locates the Creative and Analytical Written Components within their relevant fields of theory and practice. It must also outline the proportionate balance between the respective Creative and Analytical Written Components, and their preferred 'reading/viewing' order.

(32) Such submissions must equate to the standard requirement for the specific research degree of a sustained piece of written work and fulfil the designated degree requirements for thesis quality and contribution.

(33) In all submissions, the written component must comprise no less than 30 per cent of the total work presented as the Thesis by Creative Project. This equates to 18,000-30,000 words for PhD theses and 12,000-20,000 words for Masters by Research theses.

(34) The timing of the submission of the respective components of a Thesis by Creative Project is outlined in [Higher Degrees by Research Procedure 9 Submission, Examination and Classification](#).

Thesis by Publication

(35) VU permits the presentation of a thesis in the format of published and/or submitted papers for the Doctor of Philosophy, henceforth referred to as the 'Thesis by Publication' format. Such submissions must equate to a sustained piece of written work of 60,000-100,000 words in length and fulfil the designated degree requirements for thesis quality and contribution.

(36) A 'paper' is defined as referring to a report of research presented in the format of a journal article, book chapter, conference paper or any other form of written scholarly work prepared for publication (such as all or part of a book manuscript or technical report) which can be demonstrated to:

- a. have been subject to a process of academic peer review similar to that of ranked refereed journals; or
- b. be at a standard, as certified by the supervisor, equivalent to that suitable for presentation for such academic peer review.

Papers suitable for inclusion

(37) The only papers considered suitable for incorporation in a Thesis by Publication are those developed to the standard expected:

- a. in journals considered to be of good quality by researchers in the field and ranked conferences; and/or
- b. for a book chapter or monograph in scholarly collections contracted to be published by a Higher Education Research Data Collection (HERDC)-recognised publisher with demonstrated peer review processes.

(38) Normally all papers are expected to have been developed and submitted during the period of candidature. However, in certain circumstances (such as enrolling at VU with advanced candidature), candidates may be permitted to incorporate all, or a proportion of, papers from research and resulting publication undertaken prior to enrolment in a Higher Degree by Research course at VU. In such cases, the academic merit of the research project, and the suitability of each previously published or accepted paper, is verified prior to enrolment through the University's Advanced Candidature approval process (see [Higher Degrees by Research Procedure 3 Pre-Candidature and Candidature](#)).

(39) No publication that has been published more than 10 years prior to the thesis submission is eligible for inclusion.

(40) The initiation, key ideas, development and writing up of each of the papers within the thesis should be the primary responsibility of the candidate. Where any paper has multiple authors, the candidate must be the principal author of the work. This must be supported by written verification of co-authors, including their permission to incorporate the paper in the thesis submission.

(41) The thesis must contain some published papers, or papers fully accepted for publication (i.e. in press). It may also include some paper manuscripts submitted and under review or revision, and/or completed and ready to submit. At the time of thesis submission at least 50 per cent of the presented papers are expected to have been published, to be in press following acceptance for publication, or to be undergoing final revisions following positive refereeing.

(42) The total number of papers can vary according to discipline, and also depends on the proportion of the overall thesis that is presented as papers.

(43) A thesis in the Thesis by Publication format must include additional framing and linking material as part of the thesis submission to:

- a. contextualise the research problem;
- b. justify the theoretical framework;
- c. comprehensively review the relevant literature (especially that not covered in depth within the papers);
- d. account in detail for the research design, including linking of the papers to the broader research problem and approach; and
- e. draw conclusions, in relation to the overarching research problem or theme, about its contribution to knowledge, its limitations and future development.

(44) In all 'Thesis by Publication' submissions the preparation of framing and linking materials should be conducted whilst the candidate is enrolled for the degree and with supervisory input and support.

(45) Overall the material presented for examination needs to equate to that which would otherwise be presented in the standard PhD thesis format. The supervisory team is the main sources of appropriate advice to PhD candidates with respect to disciplinary norms in these matters, and on the integrity and equivalence of the proposed thesis submission to that presented in a standard thesis format.

(46) The thesis submission must include the following, in addition to the normal thesis presentation requirements:

- a. a list of paper publications and/or paper manuscripts, including verification of Scopus quartile rating of the journal or conference publication, where appropriate, and of the status of the paper in relation to its submission, review or acceptance;
- b. a [declaration](#) about authorship and contribution to the work for each paper, including acknowledgement of joint or multiple authors and verification of each of their contributions and permissions;
- c. copies of the published papers and submitted and/or final draft paper manuscripts.

(47) Some of the elements included in the thesis presentation are likely to take a different form when presented in a Thesis by Publication format. The abstract must summarise the main findings presented in each of the published papers or manuscripts. It should indicate how the included works are tied to a coherent intellectual framework, and how, when considered together, they demonstrate a significant new contribution to knowledge in the discipline or field.

Section 7 - Guidelines

(48) [Forms and guidelines for graduate researchers](#)

(49) [VU Graduate Research Training and Supervision Quality and Standards Framework](#)

Status and Details

Status	Historic
Effective Date	8th April 2019
Review Date	8th April 2022
Approval Authority	Vice-President (Research)
Approval Date	15th March 2019
Expiry Date	13th October 2020
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