Higher Degrees by Research Thesis Requirements Procedure

Section 1 - Summary

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

Section 2 - Scope

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

Section 3 - Policy/Regulation

(3) Higher Degrees by Research Policy

Section 4 - Procedures

Part A - Summary of Roles and Responsibilities

Roles	Responsibilities
Graduate Research School	Provide appropriate advice and webpage links regarding thesis requirements to the candidate and supervisors.

Part B - Components of a Higher Degree by Research

(4) Victoria University (VU) offers a number of research degrees for which a thesis is the major component of assessment, as defined in the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). These include Master of Research Practice, Master of Research, Master of Applied Research degrees, the Doctor of Philosophy degree (PhD) and the PhD (Integrated).

(5) 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 with publication that includes published and publishable papers with linking and framing material.

(6) 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 in Part C – Broad Thesis Requirements by HDR Degree.

(7) 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 Master Degree candidates. This expectation reflects the difference

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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, Masters by Research, Master of Research and Master of Research Practice

(8) The suite of Master of Research degrees are AQF Level 9 degrees with the objective of training the candidate in the application and critical evaluation of research methods and methodology through the conduct of a specified program of research under appropriate supervision. The thesis for the:

a. Master of Applied Research and Master of Research is expected to be no more than 50,000 words (and normally in the range of 25,000-50,000 words).

(9) A Master of Applied Research or Master of Research degree is awarded after external examiners and the Chair of 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 and Doctor Philosophy (Integrated)

(10) The Doctor of Philosophy (PhD and PhD (Integrated)) are both doctoral level at the AQF Level 10 degree which 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.

(11) A PhD or PhD (Integrated) thesis is expected to equate to a sustained piece of written work and demonstrate the candidate's ability to report research in a clear and succinct manner. Although there is no prescribed minimum length for a thesis as this will vary depending on the research topic and form of presentation, normally the thesis will be no less than 50,000 words and no more than 80,000 words in length. VU does not discriminate between the PhD or the PhD (Integrated) for the purposes of examination.

(12) A Doctor of Philosophy degree is awarded after external examiners and the Chair of Examiners are satisfied that the PhD/PhD (Integrated) candidates have 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.

Doctor of Philosophy (Integrated)

Year One Thesis

(13) During the first year (EFT) of the PhD (Integrated), candidates are expected to submit a Year 1 Thesis

(12000-15000 words) to an AQF Level 9 which will normally be assessed internally. Details about the Year 1 Thesis can be found in the coursework documentation.

Part D - Detailed Thesis Requirements

Thesis Titles

(14) All thesis titles must:

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

(15) 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

(16) 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).

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

(18) A change from traditional thesis format to an alternative thesis format post-confirmation of candidature is only possible for the PhDs and PhD (Integrated) (AQF Level 10).

(19) 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

Presentation

(20) Higher degree by research theses should be presented in a logical and concise manner. Victoria University specifies the following for research theses:

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, figures, images, tables etc. must be labelled, captioned and situated nearby to the text that refers to them, unless other disciplinary conventions specify otherwise;
d. all pages must be numbered; and
e. margins of a minimum of three centimetres on the left and right side of each page.

Mandatory Elements

(21) Victoria University requires the following mandatory and ordered elements for all research theses to be accepted

for examination:

a. Thesis must be written in English.
b. Title page showing the title of the thesis, the degree for which it is submitted, the full name of the candidate, the month and year of submission, and VU (refer to thesis layout sample).
c. Signed declaration of authenticity.
d. Abstract of no more than 500 words summarising the context and purpose of the research project, method of analysis used and major conclusions drawn.
e. Comprehensive acknowledgements section. It is crucial that all who have contributed to the formation of the thesis are appropriately acknowledged, including anyone who has been involved in proofreading and editing, use of an AI tool if the thesis has been edited (Student Declaration) or in other ways contributing to the work, such as previous supervisors.
f. Additional declarations as per clause (38) for Theses with Publication.
g. Comprehensive Table of Contents, with hyperlinked page numbers.
h. Body of thesis, normally with linked introductory, literature review, method, results/findings, discussion and conclusion chapters, subject to disciplinary conventions.
i. Bibliography.
j. Appendices (as required).
k. Normally the word limit for each degree includes quotes, but excludes tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes:

Master of Research	25,000-50,000 words
Master of Applied Research	25,000-50,000 words
Doctor of Philosophy	50,000-80,000 words
Doctor of Philosophy (Integrated)	50,000-80,000 words

l. The typical word length of a thesis will be influenced by the discipline of the candidate's research therefore if the word limit is below or beyond the amount specified for the degree at the time of submission, the relevant Associate Director, Research Institute (or nominee) will determine if the thesis can be placed under examination. If required, the Associate Director, Research Institute (or nominee) will consult with the candidate's Principal Supervisor.
m. In cases where the maximum word limit is exceeded, the supervisor must 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 (28c.)).

Thesis by Creative Project

(22) 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 Exegesis).

(23) 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 Associate Director, Research Institute(or nominee).

(24) 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.

(25) 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.

(26) 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 Research Degree theses.

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

Thesis with Publications – (Doctoral Level Only)

(28) VU permits the presentation of a thesis with:

a. scholarly publications; and/or,
b. manuscripts accepted for scholarly publication after peer review.

for the Doctor of Philosophy. The scholarly publications and/or manuscripts must be linked and framed to produce a coherent and cogent thesis. This format is referred to as 'Thesis with Publications'.

(29) The initiation, key ideas, development and writing up of each of the scholarly publications and/or manuscripts submitted, or those ready for submission for scholarly publication, within the thesis must be the primary responsibility of the candidate. When any paper has multiple authors, the candidate must be the principal author of the work. Prospective authors can refer to the Universities Australia, NHMRC and the ARC's Guide to Authorship, for clarity on the conditions of authorship. This must be supported by written verification from the co-authors, including their permission to incorporate the paper in the thesis submission. The research upon which the thesis and publications/manuscripts are based must not have been undertaken for another degree.

(30) Scholarly publications included in the thesis must represent original research and must have been subject to academic peer review. The scholarly publications may be in the form of a journal article, monograph, book chapter, conference paper, or other format relevant to the candidate's discipline. The scholarly publications included in a 'Thesis with Publications' must not have been published more than 10 years before the date of the submission of the thesis for examination.

(31) Manuscripts (as compared to publications) representing original research must be accepted for scholarly publication.

(32) It is expected that the scholarly publications and the targeted outlets for the manuscripts to be submitted for publication are of high quality. This may be demonstrated via Scopus quartile rankings or, for example, via discipline-specific rankings or the scholarly reputations of the editors or publishers. Supervisors and candidates are reminded, however, that it is the academic standard of the overall thesis which is examined.

(33) At the time of thesis submission, at least 50 per cent of the outputs included in the thesis must be scholarly publications or manuscripts accepted for scholarly publication after peer review.

(34) Overall the material presented for examination must meet the requirements of an AQF Level 10 doctoral degree. The total number of papers and/or manuscripts will vary for each candidate, and will depend on the proportion of the overall thesis that is presented as scholarly publications and/or manuscripts. The supervisory team is the main source 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.

(35) Normally, the scholarly publications and/or manuscripts included in a 'Thesis with Publications' are expected to have been developed during the period of candidature. Candidates may, however, be permitted to incorporate:

a. scholarly publications which were published prior to enrolment in their doctoral degree at VU; and/or
b. manuscripts they may have ready, or deemed to be ready by their proposed Principal Supervisor, for submission, in accordance with clause (41).

(36) In such cases, the academic merit of the research and the suitability of the scholarly publications and/or manuscripts will be verified prior to enrolment through the University's Advanced Candidature approval process (see Higher Degrees by Research Admissions Procedure).

(37) In all 'Thesis with Publications' submissions the preparation of the framing and linking materials should be conducted whilst the candidate is enrolled in their doctoral degree.

(38) Theses submitted in the 'Thesis with Publications' format must include an Abstract that includes a summary of the main findings presented in each of the scholarly publications and/or manuscripts. The Abstract should indicate how the scholarly publications and/or manuscripts are connected to a coherent conceptual framework, and how, when considered together, they demonstrate a significant new contribution to knowledge in the discipline or field at the doctoral level.

(39) The scholarly publications and/or accepted manuscripts must be framed and linked with material 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 scholarly publications and manuscripts);
d. account in detail for the research design, including linking of the scholarly publications and/or submitted manuscripts 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 practical significance.

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

a. a list of scholarly publications and/or paper manuscripts, including verification of Scopus quartile ranking of the publication, or other indicator of quality, and of the status of the paper in relation to its submission, review or acceptance;
b. a declaration by the candidate about co-authorship to the work for each scholarly publication and/or paper manuscript including acknowledgement of joint or multiple authors and verification of each of their contributions and permissions;
c. copies of the scholarly publications and/or paper manuscripts.

Section 5 - HESF/ASQA/ESOS Alignment

(41) HESF: Standard 4.2 Research Training; 7.2 Information for Prospective and Current Students.

(42) ESOS Act: Part 3 Division 2; Part 5 Division 2.

Section 6 - Definitions

(43) Timely Duration

Status and Details

Status	Current
Effective Date	27th April 2026
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Approval Authority	Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research & Impact
Approval Date	24th April 2026
Expiry Date	Not Applicable
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Glossary Terms and Definitions

"Timely Duration" - The normal period of time, deemed by the Commonwealth, for the degree level to be completed, i.e: minimum of 3 years (EFT) and to a maximum of 4 years (EFT) for doctoral degrees (at the discretion of the University) and for a maximum of 2 years for a Research Masters (EFT) (at the discretion of the University).

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