

Higher Degrees by Research Procedure 9 Submission, Examination and Classification

Section 1 - Purpose / Objectives

(1) Nil

Section 2 - Scope / Application

(2) This Procedure outlines Higher Degree by Research (HDR) thesis submission, nomination of examiners, examination, amending the examined thesis, and the classification and conferral process.

Section 3 - Definitions

(3) Higher Degree by Research (HDR)

Section 4 - Policy Statement

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

Section 5 - Procedures

Part A - General

(5) HDR candidates will have their thesis examined by at least two external examiners.

(6) The examination process varies by degree type.

(7) The College Director, Research Training, or their nominee, acts as Chair of Examiners for HDR theses for each College and has academic responsibility for the examination process.

(8) The Graduate Research Centre (GRC) manages the conduct of the examination and classification process.

(9) Where the Principal Supervisor is also the College Director, Research Training, he or she is unable to act as Chair of Examiners and another senior academic within the College will normally act as the Chair of Examiners for that candidate's thesis. The GRC must be advised of the appointment at the time the thesis is submitted for examination.

Part B - Nomination of examiners

Requirements for nomination

(10) The Principal Supervisor is responsible for the nomination of appropriate examiners. Once nominated examiners are reviewed and endorsed by the College Director, Research Training or their nominee prior to the approval by the Dean, Graduate Research.

(11) Candidates may provide their Principal Supervisor with a list of suitable/unsuitable examiners for consideration; however the final nominations are the Principal Supervisor's responsibility.

(12) Potential examiners should:

- a. be appropriately qualified experts normally of international standing in their discipline/field;
- b. be external to Victoria University (VU);
- c. normally be currently associated with a university or research institution;
- d. have demonstrated current research expertise relevant to the thesis;
- e. not have a conflict of interest in accordance with the official University Conflict of Interest in [Thesis Examination Guidelines](#).

(13) The specific requirements for each degree type are:

Degree	Traditional, Creative Project (no live component) and by Publication	Thesis by Creative Project (with a live performance and exhibition)
Doctoral degrees	Two appropriately qualified experts of international standing in their discipline/field	Three examiners (two plus a reserve)
Masters by Research	Two appropriately qualified experts, at least one of whom must be of international standing in their discipline/field	Three examiners (two plus a reserve)

(14) Only in exceptional and well documented circumstances will the Dean, Graduate Research approve two examiners currently employed by the same institution.

(15) The Principal Supervisor should establish that the nominated examiners will be available to assess the thesis at the anticipated time of submission, and are available to provide a report within a two month period.

(16) The Principal Supervisor is to advise potential examiners that the thesis will be sent electronically unless there is a preference for a hardbound version of the thesis.

Submission of nominations

(17) The Principal Supervisor is to submit the completed [Nomination of Examiners form](#) to the GRC two months prior to the anticipated thesis submission date. The GRC then liaises with the Chair of Examiners for review and endorsement of the examiners.

(18) If an additional examiner is required, the [Nomination of an Additional Examiner form](#) should be completed and submitted to the GRC. The GRC then manages the examiner approval process according to Clause 22.

(19) If examiners are yet to be approved at the time of submission of the thesis for examination, the GRC will contact the Principal Supervisor to ascertain when examiners will be appointed. The thesis will not be sent for examination until examiners have been properly appointed.

(20) Where a Principal Supervisor has failed to nominate examiners a month after thesis submission, the Chair of Examiners will be responsible for assisting in identifying potential examiners and ensuring that the completed [Nomination of Examiner form](#) is submitted to the GRC no later than two months following thesis submission. In such

cases, the Chair of Examiners may nominate the Principal Supervisor for deregistration for failing to nominate examiners in a timely manner.

(21) The Principal Supervisor must indicate, when nominating examiners, whether there is material in the thesis that is covered by confidentiality obligations (normally linked to a project agreement and/or invention disclosure/s), and confirm that examiners have been advised of this and have agreed to examine the thesis on a confidential basis.

(22) In nominating examiners to the Chair of Examiners, the Principal Supervisor must:

- a. provide a copy of the draft thesis abstract;
- b. provide information about each nominated examiner that demonstrates their research and research training expertise in relation to the specific project, as well as their international standing in the field (usually no more than two pages per examiner);
- c. identify and declare any major or minor potential conflicts of interest in accordance with the University [Conflict of Interest in Thesis Examination Guidelines](#).

Part C - Endorsement and approval of examiners

(23) The Chair of Examiners will review and if appropriate endorse the Principal Supervisor's recommendation of examiners. The nomination will be forwarded to the GRC for further review. Examiners will only be considered as appointed when the Dean, Graduate Research has provided final approval.

(24) Once examiners are approved and the candidate has met all submission requirements as outlined in Part D below, the thesis can be forwarded to the approved examiners.

Confidentiality of examiners

(25) The list of nominated examiners will not be disclosed to the candidate or to the other examiner/s prior to the thesis examination being completed, unless the circumstances in Clause (26) prevail.

(26) In the case of examination of a Thesis by Creative Project that requires examiner attendance at a live performance or exhibition, the candidate may be informed of the identity of the examiners at the time of the performance or exhibition, if the nature of the performance or exhibition means that it will be impossible for their role to remain confidential.

(27) Unless an examiner advises otherwise, their details will be released to the candidate at the conclusion of the examination process.

Part D - Submission of theses for examination

General requirements - all theses

(28) At least three months prior to the expected submission of thesis date, the candidate must notify their supervisors, Chair of Examiners and the GRC of their intention to submit by lodging the [Intention to Submit form](#) .

(29) The following general requirements must be met in order for a thesis to be accepted by the GRC for examination:

- a. the candidate must be currently enrolled;
- b. all required coursework must be satisfactorily completed;
- c. the thesis title must be identical to the title registered with the University. Where there has been a change of title from that which was approved at candidature, candidates must confirm the change and the reasons for it on the [Release of Thesis form](#) ;

- d. the signed candidate declaration, using the [approved template](#) must be included in the thesis;
- e. the thesis must be accompanied by a completed and signed [Release of Thesis form](#) in which the Chair of Examiners endorses the Principal Supervisor's recommendation that the thesis is of examinable standard.

(30) If there is disagreement in the first instance concerning whether or not the thesis is ready for submission, the matter should be discussed between the candidate, supervisor/s and the Chair of Examiners. If resolution cannot be found, the matter should be referred to the Dean, Graduate Research .

(31) In exceptional circumstances, if a candidate insists on submitting the thesis against the advice of the supervisors and the Chair of Examiners, the candidate will be asked to sign a declaration that releases the University from any responsibility should the nominated examiners adversely appraise the thesis.

Copies of theses

(32) Each candidate must lodge one electronic copy of their thesis (PDF) for examination in addition to the printed copy/ies specified below. The electronic copy will be emailed to the examiner/s unless they have indicated a preference for a hardbound version.

(33) In addition to the electronic copy, all HDR candidates are required to submit one spiral bound copy of their thesis, unless their supervisor has advised additional spiral bound copies are required at the request of the examiner. The spiral bound copy may be double-sided.

(34) The GRC may contact a candidate during the examination period should an additional spiral bound copy of their thesis be requested by an examiner or the Chair of Examiners.

Special requirements for submission of a Thesis by Creative Project

(35) In all cases where the creative project does not include a live performance or exhibition, the three required components for submission, the Creative Component, the Analytical Written Component and the Thesis Abstract must be submitted simultaneously.

(36) The GRC should be notified at least six months in advance of the timing of the initial presentation where the creative project involves a live performance or exhibition. The timing, in relation to the full submission of the Thesis by Creative Project for examination, will be planned and formally approved by the College, prior to the appointment of examiners and notification to the GRC.

(37) The formal submission of the Analytical Written Component may occur prior to, simultaneous with, or after the live performance or exhibition, but must occur no later than four calendar months following the conclusion of the live performance or exhibition. The scheduling of the live performance or exhibition must take this into account.

(38) All examiners will be provided with the Thesis Abstract no less than 10 University business days prior to their scheduled attendance at the live performance or exhibition. In addition, if the candidate has opted for the Analytical Written Component to be read prior to the viewing of the performance or exhibition, then this must also be provided no less than 10 University business days prior to the scheduled live performance or exhibition.

(39) If the candidate is unable to formally submit the written component of the work within four calendar months of the live performance or exhibition then an [Application for Extension form](#) must be completed prior to the due date.

(40) Failure to formally submit the written component by the due date, or apply for an extension by the due date, will result in the commencement of Unsatisfactory Progress proceedings against the candidate.

Status around submission

(41) Once a candidate has submitted their thesis for examination, they are not required to re-enrol. They will, however, remain a student of the University until their thesis has been classified.

(42) International candidates who have submitted their thesis for examination are responsible for ensuring that their visa status is current and correct if they wish to remain in the country.

(43) Scholarship stipend payments will cease on submission of a thesis for examination.

Part E - Examination process

General

(44) The thesis will be forwarded to the approved examiners normally within five University business days following receipt of the thesis and/or approval of examiners. Overseas examiners are sent the thesis by courier if a spiral bound hardcopy has been requested. The examiner will be requested to confirm receipt of the thesis.

(45) Examiners are given two months from the date the thesis was dispatched (either electronically or via the mail) to return their examination report. Examiners will receive a reminder from the GRC after six weeks and contacted again once the two month period has lapsed. In the event where an examiner's report has not been returned after 12 weeks, an additional examiner is normally appointed.

(46) If, at any time, an examiner is no longer able to assess a thesis a new examiner will be appointed and given two months from the date the thesis was dispatched (either electronically or via the mail) to assess and return their examination report.

(47) Where an examiner has requested a hard copy of the thesis, it is at their discretion to return the thesis. Any returned copies of the thesis will be sent to the candidate following the examination of the thesis.

(48) In the first instance, candidates should contact the relevant College Support Officer (CSO) should they have any questions following the submission of their thesis for examination.

(49) Examiners will receive the University's examination guidelines as well as any additional guidelines in relation to the University's expectations of the standards and outcomes for that specific research degree.

(50) If examination of the thesis is subject to confidentiality obligations, the examiners will be asked to sign and return a "One Way Confidentiality Deed Poll" prior to having the thesis released to them.

Examination of theses that include a live performance or exhibition

(51) Examiners will be advised of the format of the examinable work at the time of their engagement by the University, including any requirement to attend a live performance or exhibition.

(52) One Reserve Examiner is appointed in the event that one of the two original examiners is for some reason unable to attend the exhibition or performance, or to complete other aspects of the examination process.

(53) All examiners including the Reserve Examiner are expected to attend the exhibition or performance of the candidate's creative work as a component of the thesis.

(54) The third examiner will be designated the Reserve Examiner. The Reserve Examiner is required to produce an examination report but the report will only be used in the event that:

- a. a primary examiner is unable to attend a performance and the GRC has been unable to contact another

examiner; or

- b. a primary examiner has been able to attend the performance but unable to write a report on the performance project; or
- c. a primary examiner is late in providing a report on the performance project.

(55) The candidate will only receive the examination reports of the first two examiners unless:

- a. one of the original examiners has been replaced; or
- b. there is a divergent result between the first two examiners;

in which case they will receive all available examination reports.

(56) The examiners will write independent reports on the creative project, including a short description of the Creative Component and its execution, and provide their report and recommendation within two months of receiving the formal submission.

(57) The examiners shall not communicate with each other or the candidate about the live performance or exhibition until their independent examination reports have been submitted and the thesis has been classified.

Part F - Examiner reports and recommendations

Range of examiner recommendations

(58) Each examiner will make one of the following recommendations for the classification of the thesis/major work:

- a. PASSED without further correction;
- b. PASSED, subject to minor corrections being made to the satisfaction of the Chair of Examiners;
- c. PASSED, subject to substantial amendment, as outlined in the examiner's report, being made to the satisfaction of the Chair of Examiners;
- d. DEFERRED and the candidate should be permitted to resubmit the thesis in a revised form;
- e. FAILED.

(59) In addition to providing their examiners' report, examiners are also asked:

- a. when examining a doctorate, to assess the quality of the thesis and generic attributes;
- b. when examining a Masters by Research, to provide a numerical score and honours level assessment.

After examiners' reports are received

(60) Once all reports have been received, the GRC will send the examination reports to the candidate and forward copies to the Chair of Examiners and all supervisors via email.

(61) The University pays examiners on receipt of their examination report, in accordance with the honorarium rate set by the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee .

(62) Where there is a divergent view between the examiners about the proposed recommendation for pass, defer or fail, a third examiner will be nominated and will be sent the thesis for examination. Once the third examiner's report has been received, the view of the majority of the examiners will determine the result for the thesis. The examination results will not be released until all reports have been received.

(63) If both, or two out of three, examiners recommend that the thesis be passed, then the candidate will be required to respond to the comments made by each examiner (irrespective of the recommended grade) in the Response to

Examiner Template.

(64) Where an examiner recommends a change to the thesis title, the candidate must document their response to this in the Response to Examiner Template .

(65) After the candidate and supervisor have completed the Response to Examiner Template the candidate must submit their thesis to the Chair of Examiners normally within:

- a. two months (EFT) if both results are 'passed' with no or minor changes, or a combination of these two recommendations;
- b. four months (EFT) in all other cases (substantial amendments required).

(66) If the candidate requires additional time to make changes to the thesis, the candidate must complete the [Application for Extension form](#) two weeks prior to the expiry date. Normally no more than three additional months EFT will be granted.

(67) Where the majority of examiners have recommended a pass result the candidate does not need to re-enrol but remains a student of the University and is entitled to draw on University resources such as the library, their supervisor, and University email.

(68) Where a candidate has failed to submit the revised thesis within the timeframe outlined in Clause (64) or to apply for an extension, the GRC will commence Unsatisfactory Progress proceedings.

Recommendation for a deferred thesis

(69) If the majority of examiners recommend that the thesis be deferred, then the candidate will be required to re-enrol and undertake a major re-write of the thesis.

(70) Normally, the candidate must resubmit their thesis for re-examination by the examiners within twelve months (irrespective of study mode) of receiving the notification.

(71) If the candidate requires additional time to make changes to the thesis prior to submitting for re-examination, the candidate must complete the [Application for Extension form](#) two weeks prior to the expiry date. Normally no more than three additional months will be granted.

(72) A candidate submitting their thesis for re-examination must include a detailed letter addressing the substantive changes made to their thesis. This letter will be forwarded to the two examiners who deferred the thesis along with the resubmitted thesis. The initial examiner reports will also be returned to the examiners (the name of the other examiner will be de-identified).

(73) Where an examiner is unable to re-examine the revised thesis, a new examiner will be appointed who will be advised at the time of appointment that they are assessing a resubmitted thesis. The examiner will not be sent the initial examiner reports, template or detailed letter from the candidate addressing the substantive changes made to the thesis.

(74) The examiners will be given two months from the date of dispatch of the thesis to return their report and will only be able to grade the thesis as 'passed' or 'failed'.

(75) Where there is a divergent view between the examiners who have assessed the revised thesis, then:

- a. in the case where one passed result was received from the initial examination, this result will be used along with the re-examined results to determine the majority result of the thesis;

in the case where only two examiners have assessed the thesis, a new examiner will be appointed in line with the

provisions outlined in Clause (72).

Recommendation for a failed thesis

(76) If the majority of examiners recommend that the thesis be failed, this will be conveyed to the candidate, supervisory team, Chair of Examiners and Research and Research Training Committee. The thesis will be classified as failed.

Part G - Classification of thesis

(77) The classification of a thesis is the process whereby a grade is assigned to an HDR degree/thesis on the basis of the majority result from two or more examiners reports.

(78) In the case of doctoral degrees, the classification will be simply 'Passed' or 'Failed' and the grade recorded on the transcript will be S (ungraded pass) or U (ungraded fail).

(79) In the case of Masters by Research degrees the Chair of Examiners will make a recommendation to the Dean, Graduate Research regarding whether the thesis classification is 'Passed' or 'Failed' and assign an overall numerical score and honours level grade, which is normally the average of the two scores and grades given by each examiner.

(80) The Chair of Examiners reviews responses of the candidate and Principal Supervisor to the examiners' feedback in the Response to Examiner Template, and the final version of the thesis, completes the [Recommendation on Classification of Thesis](#) and forwards this to the GRC.

(81) The GRC Compliance Officer will forward completed classification documents as follows:

- a. where the examiners recommended either no or minor changes, and the Chair of Examiners has recommended classification, the classification documents will be reviewed, signed and classified by the Dean, Graduate Research;
- b. in all other cases, the classification paperwork will be forwarded to the Dean, Graduate Research to constitute an Academic Review Panel (ARP) to review the classification paperwork and the final thesis.

(82) For this procedure, the designated ARP will normally comprise three members from representatives nominated by College Directors, Research Training from the professoriate of their Colleges:

- a. A senior academic (Level D or E) involved in research training as a Principal supervisor, who has not had any association with the thesis (Chair);
- b. a College Director, Research Training from a College other than the one in which the candidate is enrolled; and
- c. one other senior academic (Level D or E) involved in research training who has not had any association with the thesis.

(83) Where any candidate has been the subject of Unsatisfactory Progress Proceedings and their thesis is subsequently submitted to an ARP for classification, an individual who participated in the Unsatisfactory Progress Proceedings cannot serve as a member of that Panel. In these circumstances the Dean, Graduate Research will appoint the members of the Panel, including the Chair.

(84) Once the ARP members have reviewed all documentation including the final version of the thesis and certified that the candidate has satisfied all academic requirements for the award, the members will recommend to the Chair, ARP that the thesis be classified. The Chair, on behalf of the ARP will recommend the Dean, Graduate Research (or nominee) approves the classification.

(85) In the event the revised thesis does not address the examiners feedback, the Chair, ARP will write to the

supervisory team advising of the areas requiring further clarification and/or revision and the timelines for resubmission of the revised thesis and supporting documentation to the Panel. Failure to make the required amendments in the timelines stipulated will result in unsatisfactory progress proceedings being instigated against the candidate.

(86) The GRC will notify the candidate in writing of the requirement to supply one electronic (PDF) and two hard-bound copies of the final version of the thesis by the date stipulated. This is a prerequisite in order to be eligible to graduate.

(87) Where there are commercial intellectual property issues, or the circumstances of the research project warrant the imposition of a measure of secrecy, the candidate may discuss with the supervisory team restricting partial or full access to the thesis. Candidates should consider whether restricting access would impede their ability to publish their research or to make their work and achievements known to potential employers. A thesis can be restricted for up to two years. In exceptional circumstances, a further extension to restrict access may be granted.

(88) The completed [Restricted Access to a Thesis form](#) is submitted with the hardbound copies to the GRC. The Dean, Graduate Research approves applications for restricted access to a thesis.

(89) Once the candidate's thesis has been classified, all student entitlements, including any allocated study space will cease.

Dissatisfaction with examination outcome

(90) If a candidate disagrees with the feedback received from an examiner, they should discuss their disagreement with their supervisory team and/or the Chair of Examiners and then respond in writing about their concerns as part of the process for submitting their thesis for classification.

(91) Candidates who wish to appeal the outcome of their thesis examination (including classification) may only do so on the following grounds:

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

(92) An HDR Examination Appeals Panel (HDR EAP) will be formed comprising:

- a. Panel Chair: Chair of the Research and Research Training Committee;
- b. A College Director, Research Training from a College other than that in which the candidate is enrolled;
- c. A senior researcher from the College in which the candidate is enrolled;
- d. Academic Board's Graduate Research Student representative, or nominee;
- e. Pro Vice Chancellor Research Training or nominee.

(93) The members of the Panel must not have had any prior involvement with the candidate or the examination or classification of the thesis.

(94) The decisions of the HDR EAP are final and binding and there is no further avenue for appeal within Victoria University.

Part H - Conferral of award

(95) The Dean, Graduate Research provides a list of candidates who have been classified as having satisfied all the requirements for the award to University Council, who authorises the conferral of the awards, for HDR degrees.

(96) The Dean, Graduate Research provides the Research and Research Training Committee, for transmission to the Academic Board, with a quarterly report on the classification and conferral process and the quality of the outcomes

achieved.

(97) On confirmation of receipt of the bound and electronic copies of the thesis by the GRC and conferral by the University, a Letter of Completion and testamur are generated by Assessment and Completions and forwarded to the graduand.

(98) The graduand is invited to participate in the next round of graduation ceremonies.

Conflict of Roles

(99) No individual may be involved in dual or multiple roles. Where the potential for a conflict of roles exists the following alternate delegations will normally apply:

- a. For College Director, Research Training who is also the Principal Supervisor - The Dean from the College (or their nominee, normally a senior academic).
- b. For College Director, Research Training of the College in which the candidate is enrolled — College Director, Research Training) of another College.
- c. For Centre or Institute Director who is also the Principal Supervisor - Director from another Centre or Institute.
- d. For the Dean, Graduate Research - Pro Vice Chancellor Research Training or nominee.

Section 6 - Guidelines

(100) Nil

Status and Details

Status	Historic
Effective Date	1st July 2015
Review Date	1st March 2018
Approval Authority	Vice-Chancellor
Approval Date	29th June 2015
Expiry Date	29th August 2018
Accountable Officer	Andrew Hill Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research & Impact Andrew.Hill@vu.edu.au
Responsible Officer	John Price Dean, Graduate Research 9919 2046
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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.