Higher Degree Research Examination Procedure

Purpose

This procedure describes the examination processes for all higher degree research programs at UNSW Sydney.

Scope

It applies to all higher degree research candidates, supervisors, Postgraduate Research Coordinators, Faculty Committees and other positions responsible for management of higher degree research. The relevant Conditions for Award Policy should be read in conjunction with this procedure. Candidates who enrolled in PhD, Professional Doctorate and Master by Research programs prior to 2023 are not required to complete the oral examination component unless they have divergent thesis examination reports.

Are Local Documents on this subject permitted?

☐ Yes, subject to areas specifically restricted within this Procedure.
☒ No

1. Introduction

A critical part of a higher degree research (HDR) degree is the assessment of a HDR candidate’s ability to carry out a research investigation. It is important to assess both the candidate and the thesis submitted for the award of the HDR degree. As such, Higher Degree Research examination has several components, each of which must be assessed as satisfactory before the degree can be awarded. This includes examination of the thesis, oral examination and/or creative work examination.

The examination process must:

- establish that the candidate fully understands the work and its wider implications;
- provide the candidate with an opportunity to reply to criticism or challenge;
- enable the examiners to clarify issues in the thesis which may be unclear;
- help the examiners to decide on the nature, content and extent of any revisions which may be required;
- authenticate the contribution made by the candidate to the thesis; and
- ensure that the candidate has a clear understanding of the contribution of collaborators to the thesis.

This procedure outlines the processes for:

(a) preparation, submission and examination of the thesis component of all HDR programs, and
(b) the conduct of the oral examination where it is required.

It also includes the roles and responsibilities of Higher Degree Research (HDR) candidates, supervisors, Postgraduate Research Coordinators (PGC) and the Faculty Higher Degree Committee (HDC) in the examination process. This procedure must be read in conjunction with the relevant Conditions of Award Policy.
2. Examination Criteria

2.1. Thesis Component

Examiners are expected to submit to the University an assessment regarding the quality of the thesis (as detailed in the relevant Conditions of Award Policy) and it needs to provide a strong justification for their recommendation. Where indicated, the examiner must provide guidance to the candidate regarding any changes required to the thesis. For HDR candidates enrolled from Term 1 2023, this assessment will also require the examiner to confirm that the oral examination component can proceed.

The examiners are asked to examine the thesis component against the following criteria:

- Does the candidate demonstrate a significant and original contribution to knowledge (relative to the level of the degree being sought)?
- Does the candidate engage with the literature and the work of others?
- Does the candidate show an advanced knowledge of research principles and methods related to the applicable discipline?
- Is there a clear and discernible lucidity in the presented research, its arguments and conclusions?
- Is the thesis clearly, accurately and logically written?

2.2. Oral Examination Component

The oral examination component is used to assess the candidate on the following criteria:

- Does the candidate demonstrate detailed knowledge of the thesis?
- Does the candidate demonstrate the originality of the thesis and the contribution it makes to the state of knowledge in the field?
- Does the candidate appropriately defend the methodology and conclusions of the thesis?
- Does the candidate display awareness of the limitations of the thesis?

3. Examination Panel

3.1. Role of the Examination panel

An Examination Panel must be appointed to administer the examination. The role of the Panel is to:

(a) review the thesis;
(b) carry out the oral examination (if required for the program); and
(c) provide a final written report and recommendation to the Dean of Graduate Research on whether the degree should be awarded and the level of revisions required.

3.2. Composition of the Panel

The examination panel shall comprise:

(a) A Chair, who must be a senior UNSW academic with experience in HDR supervision. The PGC of the School may be the Chair if appropriate. The
Chair provides disciplinary and school specific representation and must be independent of both the supervisory team and the candidate.

(d) Two examiners external to UNSW,
(e) Members of the supervisory team are not permitted to be part of the examination panel but may attend in the capacity of observers providing the candidate is supportive.

4. Responsibilities

4.1. The candidate
Higher degree research candidates are responsible for:

- The preparation and submission of their thesis for examination. They must ensure that the research described was completed during the period of enrolment for the degree and that it is an account of their own research.
- Ensuring that UNSW’s policies and procedures on the responsible conduct of research are followed (see Related Documents).

4.2. Supervisors
Supervisors are responsible for:

- Providing formal advice on progress of the candidate's thesis to the candidate throughout the candidature, and especially prior to submission of the thesis.
- Ensuring that the thesis is in a format suitable for examination and that the candidate has followed all the procedures required for thesis submission (in the case of the Primary Supervisor).
- Ensuring that the candidate is prepared for the oral examination component.
- Ensuring that the candidate understands the policies and procedures for the responsible conduct of research.
- Providing recommendations to the PGC on the nomination of suitable experts to examine the thesis.
- Supporting the candidate in addressing the corrections requested by the examination panel.

4.3. Postgraduate Research Coordinator (PGC)
The Postgraduate Research Coordinator (PGC) is responsible for:

- Nominating suitable examiners of the thesis to the HDC based on the recommendations of the supervisory team.
- Ensuring that the nominated examiners are appropriate and that the examination can be carried out independently and free from perception of or actual bias.
- Either appointing the Chair of the Examination Panel or acting as the Chair of the Examination Panel.

4.4. Examiners
Examiners are responsible for:

- Providing a fair, independent and expert report on the thesis.
- Taking the academic lead in the oral examination, asking questions of the candidate on the subject of the thesis and on relevant matters in the field or fields
to which the subject belongs and discussing with the candidate issues raised in the examiners’ reports.

4.5. Chair of the Examination Panel
The Chair of the Examination Panel (the Chair) is responsible for

- Ensuring that all aspects of the examination proceeds appropriately
- Ensuring that the examiners have reached a consensus on the recommendation and
- Providing a final recommendation regarding the award of the degree.

4.6. Faculty Higher Degree Committee (HDC) or Delegate
The HDC or Delegate (such as the HDC Executive, the Faculty Associate Dean of Research Training (ADRT) or the Director of Postgraduate Research (DPGR)) is responsible for:

- Reviewing nomination of examiners, confirming that the examiners are appropriate and free from perceived or actual conflict of interest and appointing the examiners.
- Managing the examination process in situations where the primary supervisor has not signed the supervisor certificate.
- Reviewing the thesis corrections for candidates enrolled in PhD, Prof Doc and Master by Research programs prior to 2023.

4.7. Dean of Graduate Research or Delegate
The Dean of Graduate Research is responsible for:

- The implementation of the Procedure
- Determining whether a HDR candidate has satisfied requirements for the award of a degree.

5. Format of the Thesis
The thesis must be a coherent, scholarly body of work and must meet the specified format and standards.

5.1. Minimum requirements

(a) An introduction that contextualises the research in relation to the current knowledge in the field.

(b) Thesis chapters are in a logical and cogent sequence presenting an argument that supports the main findings of the thesis.

(c) An independent discussion that integrates the significant findings of the thesis.

(d) A conclusion that summarises the findings and articulates clearly the new contribution to knowledge in the discipline.

(e) A candidate may submit work as part of the thesis that has been published or accepted for publication or manuscripts submitted for publication that contribute directly to their argument and support their findings (see Section 6.2). A thesis with publications incorporated must also meet the above minimum requirements.

(f) In addition, there are alternative formats for the HDR thesis that may be suitable for some disciplines and/or for some candidates, such as the incorporation of portfolios of creative works and/or exhibitions of practice-
based research. Faculty HDCs will provide guidance on discipline specific requirements.

6. **Thesis Preparation and Submission**

The Graduate Research School (GRS) website provides candidates with guidelines and checklists for the format, number of copies and length of the thesis appropriate for the degree. All required approvals must be completed before the candidate’s thesis can be examined.

6.1. **Format and Number of Copies**

(a) Formatting requirements are set out in the GRS Thesis Format Guide (GRS Guidelines) on the GRS website. Candidates should also consult their supervisors or other advisors within their enrolling unit on any disciplinary formatting requirements appropriate to the degree for which the thesis is being prepared.

(b) At the completion of the examination and prior to conferral, every candidate who has satisfied requirements for the award of the degree must deposit a final version of the thesis for deposit and preservation in the University Library. Candidates can opt to have their thesis placed under embargo for 2 years or less, in which case the thesis will be released by the library after this period has elapsed (see Section 6.3). See the Open Access Policy, the Library Website and the GRS Sharepoint for full details.

(c) An abstract must be included before the Table of Contents indicating the problem investigated, the procedures followed, the general results obtained and the major conclusions reached. The abstract must not contain any illustrations. Candidates must provide the abstract to the GRS by the method advised on the GRS website so that it can be appended as part of the Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement.

(d) All copies must include the Thesis/Dissertation Sheet, Originality Statement and the Inclusion of Publications Statement (see section 6.2) as outlined in Appendix A and the GRS Guidelines.

(e) The Copyright and Authenticity Statements must be included in the final officially approved version of the thesis submitted to the library. If copyright on third-party material has been assigned to a publisher, permission must be sought, in advance of submission, to reproduce the work in the thesis.

6.2. **Incorporation of Publications into the Thesis**

UNSW is supportive of candidates publishing their research results during their candidature. A ‘Publication’ includes work that has either been published or submitted for publication during candidature. Candidates must provide full details of whether there are publications in the thesis on the Inclusion of Publications Statement (see Appendix A). If publications or part thereof are included, the statement must be completed and signed off by both the primary supervisor and the PGC. Faculties may have discipline-specific guidelines that should also be consulted.

If publications or manuscripts are included in the thesis, the following process must be followed:

(a) Published work or manuscripts may only be included in the thesis if the research and its publication occurred during candidature for the degree.

(b) It is expected that the candidate is the sole primary author of the publications or manuscripts included in the thesis.
(c) Where the candidate is not the sole primary author of a publication, the contributions of others to the research and the writing of the publication must be acknowledged. Where the papers have multiple authors, permission to include the publication/s in the thesis must be sought from the co-authors.

(d) In cases where other co-authors are also HDR candidates and who may also want to include the work in their thesis, the HDC must establish whether it is appropriate for the work to be incorporated as a publication or whether it should be presented in a conventional thesis format, with clear acknowledgement of contributions.

(e) It is expected that published work included in the thesis has been published in high-quality peer-reviewed journals or other locations that are discipline appropriate.

(f) If required, the thesis should have appropriate linking text in the form of short chapters inserted between published works to support coherence of the thesis.

(g) The candidate must obtain permission to reproduce copyright material where the right to reproduce has not already been granted as part of the publication process by the copyright holder. If copyright on third-party material has been assigned to a publisher, permission must be sought, in advance of submission, to reproduce the work in the thesis.

6.3. Pre-Submission Procedures

Examiners must be nominated and approved prior to thesis submission wherever possible. To expedite this, the following process applies:

(a) The candidate must complete the notification of intention to submit (NOITS) form at least 2 months prior to the expected thesis submission date via the method outlined on the GRS website. This is required to allow adequate time for the examiners of the thesis to be nominated and approved.

(b) In some cases, the expected date of submission will change from the date recorded on the NOITS. In such cases, candidates can contact the HDR Examination team of the Graduate Research School to update the expected submission date. There is no need to re-submit the NOITS.

In addition, there are three circumstances which require separate approval before submission of the thesis:

6.3.1 Restricted Access of the Thesis

(a) All theses produced under a UNSW HDR program must be publicly available. However, in some circumstances, immediate public access to the thesis may not be desirable or appropriate. An embargo of two years or less is available and candidates can opt-in when they deposit the final digital copy of the thesis to the Library. The Library will be informed of approved restrictions and will apply these for the agreed period.

(b) If the candidate believes that the embargo will need to be for more than two years, they will need to request permission at least six months before submitting the thesis for examination. A Restricted Access form for this request is available on the GRS website. These requests must provide strong evidence for why an extended embargo is required.

6.3.2 Confidentiality of Examination

(a) While all examinations are expected to be carried out confidentially, there are situations when either the candidate or a third party requires a certain level of legal protection. For example, the thesis may contain material
that is commercial-in-confidence, or it may give rise to a patent, or may be legally or culturally sensitive.

(c) The candidate can request a confidential examination through the Notification of Intention to Submit process. If the primary supervisor agrees that a confidential examination is needed, they must declare this as part of the approval process.

(b) If a confidential examination request is approved, the GRS will advise each examiner that a confidential examination has been requested and will ask them to indicate their agreement to comply with a non-disclosure agreement. The examiners confirm that they will not disclose any of the thesis content and will return, destroy or delete all copies of materials relating to the thesis, including the thesis itself.

(c) The approval of a request for a confidential thesis examination does not confer any right to embargo public access to the final version of the thesis after the examination is complete. This must be requested as described in Section 6.3.1.

6.3.3 Thesis Submission in Less Than the Minimum Number of Terms

(a) In exceptional circumstances, a candidate who demonstrates outstanding research skills may request submission of the thesis in less than three years (full-time) for a PhD of Professional Doctorate or one and a half years (full-time) for a Master by Research or Master of Philosophy degree. Prior to approval of early submission the candidate must submit a request to the Faculty HDC which provides:

- Evidence of outstanding research including publication of a substantial body of work in leading international journals in their field;
- Supporting documentation from the primary supervisor and the PGC confirming that the candidate will not be disadvantaged by submitting early; and
- Confirmation via the Research Progress Review process that a high level of achievement throughout the candidature has been achieved.

6.4. Plagiarism and Research Data Management

(a) UNSW requires researchers to produce work that is robust and accurate and conducted in accordance with the UNSW Research Code of Conduct and related policies and procedures.

(b) It is expected that the supervisors will use iThenticate as a tool to support the writing process throughout the candidature.

(c) The primary supervisor must use iThenticate to confirm that the final work is free of plagiarism and suitable for examination. This will be documented in the supervisor’s certificate before submission of the thesis.

(d) The primary supervisor must confirm that the research data associated with the final work has been archived as per UNSW’s policies and procedures. This will be documented in the supervisor’s certificate before submission of the thesis.

6.5. Supervisor’s Certificate Process

6.5.1 Approval of Supervisor’s Certificate

Before the thesis can be sent for examination, the primary supervisor must complete the supervisor’s certificate. Completion of the supervisor’s certificate is
not an endorsement that the thesis will pass examination. The supervisor's certificate must confirm that:

- the thesis is in a format suitable for examination as described in Section 5
- the thesis includes an abstract that conforms to UNSW requirements and accurately represents the thesis
- the supervisor is satisfied with the quality of the writing of the thesis
- the thesis is free of any plagiarised material and the final version of the thesis has been reviewed using iThenticate to check for similarity and plagiarism
- the required declarations on originality, authenticity and authorship have been made by the candidate and
- in cases where there are either sole author or co-authored publications that make up part of the thesis, the required declarations as set out in Section 6.2 have been obtained by the candidate.

6.5.2 Supervisor’s Certificate Not Approved

In cases where the primary supervisor believes that they cannot sign the supervisor’s certificate, the following process is required:

- they must advise both the candidate and PGC in writing of their reasons for not approving the candidate’s thesis submission. This must be done prior to, or up to 2 weeks following the thesis being submitted.
- If the candidate still wishes to submit their thesis against the recommendation of their supervisor, the PGC will request written submissions from both the candidate and the primary supervisor for review at the next available Faculty HDC meeting.
- The PGC provides a recommendation to the Faculty HDC on whether the thesis should be submitted for examination, and if not, what remedial action needs to be taken.
- If the HDC determines that the thesis be examined against the recommendation of the primary supervisor, the HDC becomes responsible for the nomination of examiners and the examination process.
- If the HDC determines that the thesis should not be submitted, then the candidate is notified of this decision. The chair of the HDC will liaise with the Head of School (HoS) to arrange a meeting with the candidate, PGC and the primary supervisor to determine how to proceed.

7. Nomination of Examiners

7.1. Selection Process

(a) In advance of the planned submission date, the Faculty shall appoint two external examiners as well as the Chair of the Examination Panel. The Faculty may seek advice from the PGC, primary supervisor, co-supervisor, HoS or other member of academic staff.

(b) Prior to the appointment of examiners, the supervisor shall ascertain in writing whether the candidate has any concerns regarding the suitability of any person as a potential examiner and/or has identified anyone whose appointment as an examiner may result in a conflict of interest during the examination (e.g. any potential employers). For this purpose, the Faculty requires the primary supervisor to ask the candidate to either provide the
names of any persons that should not be examiners, or to identify any names on a panel of potential examiners about whose potential role the candidate may have concern.

- Any concern raised by the candidate shall be placed on record with the Faculty at the time of the appointment of examiners.
- Where possible, the persons identified by the candidate should not be used as examiners.

(c) If the primary supervisor has failed to provide suitable recommendations within 4 weeks of the candidate submitting their thesis for examination, the PGC must take responsibility for the nomination of examiners to ensure a timely examination process.

(d) The nominated examiners must:

- Be experts in the discipline, independent of the conduct of the research, academically reputable in the field of the thesis, with a significant body of published work, or other publicly recognised output as appropriate for their discipline;
- Be external to the enrolling institution;
- Be free from any real or perceived conflict of interest (COI), as per the UNSW Conflict of Interest Policy and the UNSW Higher Degree Examiner Conflict of Interest Guide. All real or perceived COI must be declared and explained on the UNSW Nomination of Examiners form (see Section 7.3);
- Typically hold a qualification at least equivalent to the level of the award being examined; and
- Have previous experience in HDR supervision and/or HDR examination.

(e) For the examination of a PhD thesis, it is preferred that at least one of the nominated examiners be from outside Australia.

(f) Once the Examination Panel has been finalised, the candidate should be informed of the identity of all members appointed.

7.2 Information Provided to Examiners During the Nomination Process

Primary supervisors are responsible for making the initial contact with potential examiners. The information provided to examiners should include:

- The UNSW examination model, including written and oral components
- The topic or title of the thesis
- The degree for which the candidate is submitting the thesis
- The planned submission date
- The length of time available for the examination of the thesis and proposed arrangements for an oral examination
- Reference to relevant UNSW procedures for examination.

7.2.1 Change to examination date

(a) The examiner will be notified by the supervisor or school of any changes to the planned submission date after an examiner has accepted and the HDC has approved their nomination.

(b) If an examiner is no longer available to examine the thesis after the amended date, the GRS must be informed so an alternate examiner can be nominated.
7.3. Conflict of Interest (COI)

The thesis must be examined independently and free from actual or perceived bias. The primary supervisor should also consult other members of the supervisory team about potential examiners and avoid any real or perceived conflict of interest (COI) with the potential examiners prior to their nomination. Supervisors should consult the UNSW Conflict of Interest Policy and the UNSW Higher Degree Examiner Conflict of Interest Guide to assist them in this process.

In cases where any real or perceived COI exists the following process applies:

(a) The COI must be declared by the primary supervisor, and any other members of the candidate’s supervisory team, on the Nomination of Examiners form.

(b) The existence of a COI does not automatically prevent the approval of a nominated examiner. Information provided about the nature of the conflict is assessed by the Faculty and the Dean of Graduate Research in the decision-making process.

(c) If a COI arises once the examination was commenced, one or both examiners' reports may be annulled, in which case (a) replacement examiner(s) will be appointed as described in the process outlined in Section 6.1.

7.4. Nomination of Examiners (NOE) Process

To appoint the examiners, the following process applies:

(a) the UNSW Nomination of Examiners (NOE) form must be completed and submitted by the primary supervisor. A robust justification of the suitability of the examiner must be provided, along with the examiner's contact details and the declaration of any potential COI issues (see Section 7.3).

(b) The completed NOE form should be submitted to the PGC for endorsement ideally 2 weeks before the submission of the candidate’s thesis.

(c) The PGC is responsible for reviewing the NOE. If they have additional questions about the justifications for an examiner's nomination, or any declared or undeclared COI, they will discuss this with the primary supervisor.

(d) The PGC must nominate an appropriate Chair and provide a justification for their suitability and their independence from the candidate and the research being examined.

(e) For candidates enrolled in PhD, Prof Doc and Master of Research programs prior to 2023, it is expected that the PGC will act as the Chair of the Examination Panel. However, this would not apply in cases where the PGC is part of the supervisory team.

(f) Once satisfied with the NOE form, the PGC notifies the Faculty of their approval.

(g) The Faculty, either by ADRT (or Faculty equivalent) or the HDC, will review any declaration of possible COIs and approve the nominated examiners. In cases where a COI is declared and the Faculty approves the examiners, the Dean of Graduate Research (or delegate) will review the form to ensure UNSW’s policies and procedures are being followed. Once approved, the NOE form is returned to the GRS for processing and the candidate will be informed of the examiners.

7.5. Date of the Oral Examination

As part of the nomination of examiners process, the date of the oral examination should be discussed with the approved Examination Panel in order to agree an appropriate date. The candidate must be informed of this date upon submission of the thesis.
7.6. Disclosure of Examination Panel Identity and Candidate Contact

The identity of the examination panel will be known to the candidate throughout the examination process. It is appropriate for the primary supervisor to inform the candidate once the NOE process has been completed.

(a) The examiners are expected to provide fair, independent and expert reports to the Panel Chair. This does not imply any further obligation on the part of the examiners directly to the candidate.

(b) Candidates must not contact any members of the examination panel during the thesis examination process. This commences after nomination of the examiners has been approved and concludes only when the examination process is complete. Violation of this requirement may be construed as an attempt to influence the examination and may give rise to an allegation of academic misconduct.

(c) Examiners must not contact candidates or any members of the supervisory team directly during the examination process. If they require information, they should contact the GRS. If contact is made by an examiner, the candidate and supervisor/s should inform the GRS immediately.

(d) The procedure for contact between candidate and examiner during examination will be disclosed to examiners at the time the thesis is sent.

8. Examination Processes and Timelines

8.1. Information Provided to Examination Panel

The GRS will provide the following information in GRIS to the examination panel at the time the thesis is sent:

(a) The list of the contents of the examination package and contact details of the other member of the examination panel, who they may contact if they wish to discuss any aspect of the thesis.

(b) Information for examiners of theses, including honorarium amounts.

(c) A thesis receipt acknowledgement and payment details form.

(d) An examiner’s report form.

(e) Information about the oral examination component.

(f) Notes for examiners for the relevant degree and

(g) The conditions for award of the relevant degree.

8.2. Timelines

(a) A candidate’s thesis will typically be sent to examiners no later than one week after submission, provided that examiners have been approved, and all other requirements have been met.

(b) Examiners are asked to review and accept their nomination, acknowledging receipt of the thesis once the thesis has been made available to them in GRIS. The GRS will send a reminder to any examiners who are yet to confirm receipt of the thesis after 2 weeks.

(c) Examiners are expected to provide a report by a specified date, typically 6 weeks from the date of the receipt of the thesis. The GRS will send a reminder to examiners regarding the due date of their report 2 weeks prior to the due date, increasing to weekly after the due date has passed.
(d) If reports are not submitted to the GRS by the due date, the GRS will provide details of the overdue report(s) to the PGC, who will then contact the examiners regarding their overdue report.

(e) If a reasonable revised report due date cannot be negotiated with the examiner, the primary supervisor will be advised, and a new examiner will need to be nominated as outlined in Section 7.

(f) Once a thesis has been sent to a replacement examiner, any report subsequently received from the examiner who was replaced shall not be considered in determining the result of the examination.

8.3. The Examination Process

The examination has two components: the written examination and the oral examination.

8.3.1. Written Examination Component

(a) Examiners will be sent a copy of the thesis following thesis submission. Each examiner must submit:
   • a written report on the thesis and a completed examination criteria form
   • a recommendation on whether to proceed to the oral examination component; and
   • a selection of questions to be addressed in the oral examination.

(b) Both examiners’ reports will be considered by the Chair. The examiners’ reports will also be sent to the supervisors on a confidential basis. Supervisors may comment on the reports in writing to the Chair on a confidential basis.

(c) The Chair may also request clarification of issues raised in examiners’ reports from the examiners and supervisors.

(d) A meeting of the Panel should be held prior to the oral examination to confirm how the examination will be conducted.

(e) If the recommendations of the examiners on whether to proceed to the oral examination are in conflict, the Chair will consult with both examiners to determine whether the examination can proceed to the oral examination. The Chair must provide a written report on the outcome of the consultations to the Dean of Graduate Research. This report will replace the two existing reports. If it is found that the panel cannot come to an agreement, the Dean of Graduate Research may engage an independent assessor to finalise the examination process.

8.3.2. Oral Examination Component

(a) The oral examination should be scheduled approximately 8 weeks after the thesis has been submitted for examination.

(b) The timing, location and other arrangements for the examination will be finalised and all parties will be informed by the Chair.

(c) Attendance at the oral examination can be held either face to face or via videoconference (Zoom/Teams). It is also reasonable to have a hybrid meeting. For virtual and hybrid meetings, if serious technical issues arise during the examination, the examination should be stopped and re-
scheduled for a later time. Any minor technical issues can be documented by the Chair.

(d) Both examiners can be present for the oral examination. However, if one examiner is unable to attend the examination, the oral examination can still be held. The remaining examiner will assume the responsibility of conducting the examination, with the Chair ensuring all comments and queries of the other examiner are addressed.

(e) The Chair will distribute the examiner reports to the candidate no later than 1 week prior to the examination.

(f) As part of the oral examination, the candidate will be required to give a presentation to the panel and colleagues, during which the candidate should:
   
   • identify the core component of the thesis, its methodology, and its outcome; and
   
   • establish the originality and significance of their work in relation to previous scholarship and practice in the area.

(g) At the beginning of the oral examination, the Chair will explain to the candidate the composition of the examination panel, and the order of proceedings. It is expected that once discussion is underway, this will flow naturally with questions in no particular order. The examiners will discuss with the candidate issues raised in the examiners’ reports and ask questions of the candidate. The Chair will ensure that all of the examiners’ comments and questions are discussed. When one examiner is not present, the other examiner will also ask questions on their behalf.

(h) The oral examination will normally last between one to two hours, and the Chair must ensure that breaks are taken if the examination exceeds two hours in duration.

(i) When the examiners are satisfied that the issues in the written reports, as well as any other concerns and interests have been adequately covered, they shall advise the Chair to bring proceedings to an end.

(j) When the oral examination has ended, the panel will discuss the examination in camera and draft the final report and recommendation. The final report must address the performance of the candidate in the oral examination, (including the criteria outlined in Section 2.2) and document the outcome of the questions asked. They must detail the list of revisions required so that it is clear what is expected for the candidate to be awarded the degree.

(k) Once the recommendation is finalised, the candidate will be invited back and advised of the panel’s recommendation. However, the candidate should be advised that this recommendation is provisional. The final outcome is determined by the Dean of Graduate Research, who will consider all the reports and any recommended corrections made to the thesis.

9. Examination Outcomes For Candidates Enrolled in HDR Programs from 2023

On completion of the oral examination, the Chair will provide a written report and recommendation, endorsed by the examiners, to the Dean of Graduate Research. This report must provide a strong justification for the recommendation. It must address the performance of the candidate in the oral examination and how the questions and issues were addressed. The report will outline the revisions required to the thesis
before the degree can be awarded. The report will include one of the following final recommendations:

(a) **Award** - award the degree.

(b) **Minor Corrections** - award the degree after specified minor corrections to the thesis have been made to the satisfaction of the Chair and the Dean of Graduate Research by a specified date.

(c) **Further Work** - award the degree subject to revising part or parts of the thesis to the satisfaction of the Chair and the Dean of Graduate Research by a specified date.

(d) **Revise and re-examine** - permit the candidate to revise the thesis and resubmit it for examination on one further occasion only by a specified date.

(e) **Non-Award** – the thesis does not merit the award of the degree and does not demonstrate sufficient merit to warrant resubmission.

### 9.1. Thesis corrections

The Graduate Research School will notify the candidate of the recommendation and the next steps following the examination.

(a) In cases where the examination recommendation is 9(a), (b) or (c), the candidate must make the required corrections to the thesis. The candidate will submit a response to the examiner comments using the template provided by the GRS together with a revised thesis showing the corrections that have been made.

- The GRS will advise the candidate and primary supervisor of the expected due date for the candidate to submit their responses to examiner comments to their primary supervisor, which is typically 2 weeks from the date of notification in the case where the examination recommendation is 9(a) or (b) and 6 weeks in the case where the examination recommendation is 9(c).

- Following the submission of responses and the revised thesis by the candidate, the primary supervisor reviews the response and the revised thesis and advises the Chair whether they are satisfied with the changes.

- The Chair of the Panel will review the corrections and responses to the examiners reports and if satisfied, will make a recommendation to the Dean of Graduate Research to award the degree.

(b) In cases where the examination recommendation is 9(d), the process in Section 9.2 is followed.

(c) In cases where the examination recommendation is 9(e), the process in Section 9.3 is followed.

### 9.2. Revise and re-examine

When a candidate receives a recommendation of 9(d) to revise and re-examine, the candidate will be permitted to re-enrol in order to revise the thesis.

(a) The final Examination report must clearly state what the candidate is required to do to be able to achieve the required standard when they resubmit the revised thesis.

(b) The Chair will make a recommendation to the Dean of Graduate Research on the amount of time that the candidate needs to address the concerns raised in the reports. It is normally expected that the candidate would have to re-enrol for at least two terms to carry out the required work and revisions. Candidates
should undergo progress reviews as detailed in Section 7.4 of the *Research Progress Review and Confirmation of Research Candidatures Procedure*.

(c) The GRS will provide the candidate with the responses to examiner comments template and copies of all examination reports, as well as confirm the expected timeframe to complete the corrections and submit the revised thesis for re-examination.

(d) The original panel should be used to re-examine the thesis, where possible. The GRS will send the thesis, the original examiners’ reports, the oral examination report, and the candidate’s responses to the report to the Examination Panel.

(e) Examiners must submit a report and recommendation to the Chair.

(f) A repeat oral examination will be scheduled, and the examination will proceed as in Section 8.3.2.

(g) The candidate is only permitted to revise and be re-examined once. As such, the outcome of the repeat examination may only be 9(a), (b), (c) or (e).

### 9.3. Non-Award

If the recommendation after the oral examination for a PhD or a Prof Doc is Non-Award, the Examination Panel must consider whether the candidate has satisfied the conditions for the award of a Masters by Research degree. Once that decision has been made, the Chair of the Panel should inform the candidate of the final decision. The final report must provide justifications for the recommendation.

The Dean of Graduate Research will review the report, after which the formal examination outcome will be communicated to the candidate, primary supervisor and Chair.

### 10. Examination Outcomes For PhD, Professional Doctorate and Master by Research Candidates Enrolled Prior to 2023

Candidates enrolled in the PhD, Professional Doctorate and Master by Research prior to 2023 are not required to undergo the oral examination component. These candidates will be given the option to do the oral examination component, but if they choose not to do that, then the examination outcomes and process will be as below.

(a) When both examiners’ reports have been received, they will be reviewed and a recommendation provided on the next steps in the process within 1 week of receipt. Reports will be sent to the Chair of the Examination Panel.

(b) It is expected that candidates will address any issues raised by the examiners and make corrections as required. The candidate will submit a response to examiner comments using the template provided by the GRS.

(c) The award of the degree occurs once appropriate corrections have been made to the satisfaction of the Dean of Graduate Research and the recommendation to award the degree is approved.

#### 10.1. Award or Minor Corrections

If the reports recommend Award or a combination of Award and Minor Corrections, they will be sent to the Chair of the Examination Panel for a recommendation on the level of corrections required and time period within which the revisions should be made. The GRS will convey the Chair’s recommendation to the candidate and primary supervisor, along with both examiner reports. The GRS will also advise the candidate and primary supervisor of the expected due date for the candidate to submit their responses to examiner comments to their primary supervisor, which is typically 2
weeks from the date of notification in the case of a PGC recommendation of minor corrections.

- Following the submission of responses and the revised thesis by the candidate, the primary supervisor advises the Chair whether they are satisfied with the changes.

- The Chair will review the candidate’s responses and revised thesis. When the Chair believes that the candidate has satisfactorily addressed the examiner comments, they will make a recommendation to the Dean of Graduate Research to award the degree.

- If the thesis has been assessed as Award by both examiners, the degree can be awarded once the final version of the thesis is submitted. However, even in such cases if the examiner(s) do suggest corrections, it is expected that the candidate will either incorporate the corrections into the final version of the thesis or provide a justification for why they are not appropriate.

10.2. Further Work

If the reports contain one or more recommendations of Further Work, but no Revise/Re-examine or Non-Award recommendation, the reports will be sent to the Chair for a recommendation on the level of corrections required. The GRS will send the examiner reports and the Chair’s recommendation to the candidate and primary supervisor. The GRS will also advise of the expected due date for the candidate to submit their responses to examiner comments to their primary supervisor which is typically 6 weeks from the date of notification.

- Following the submission of responses and the revised thesis by the candidate, the primary supervisor must advise the Chair whether they are satisfied with the changes. The Chair will conduct a review of the candidate’s responses and revised thesis and when they are satisfied that the examiners’ comments have been addressed, they submit their recommendation to the HDC for review.

- The candidate’s response to the Chair recommendations of further work will be considered by the HDC who can engage an independent reviewer if they so choose. Should the HDC require additional work by the candidate, the PGC will advise the candidate and primary supervisor what is required.

- Once the HDC is satisfied that the candidate has satisfactorily addressed the comments of the examiners, they will make a recommendation to the Dean of Graduate Research to award the degree.

10.3. Revise and Re-examine

When both examiners recommend Revise and Re-examine, the Dean of Graduate Research will review the reports and provide advice to the HDC. Examiner reports will be sent to the Chair for review and discussion with the primary supervisor and the candidate, after which the Chair will provide a recommendation to the HDC.

(a) The HDC will assess both reports and make a recommendation to the Dean of Graduate Research on the amount of time that the candidate needs to address the concerns raised in the reports. It is expected that the candidate will have to re-enrol for at least two terms to carry out the required work and revisions.

(b) The HDC can recommend a longer period of enrolment if it is felt that the revisions require further time. Candidates should undergo progress reviews as detailed in Section 7.4 of the Research Progress Review and Confirmation of Research Candidatures Procedure.
(c) The GRS will advise the candidate, primary supervisor and Chair of the recommendation from the HDC and the timeframe for revisions afforded to the candidate. The GRS will also provide the candidate with the responses to examiner comments template and copies of both examiner reports.

(d) The thesis will be submitted for re-examination and where possible, the re-examination should be carried out by the original examiner(s). If this is not possible, the procedure described in Section 11.1 will be followed.

(e) The candidate is only permitted to revise and be re-examined once. As such, the outcome of the repeat examination may only be 9(a), (b), (c) or (e).

(f) Once the examination report(s) on the revised thesis has been received by the GRS, the examination process will continue as in Section 8.1, 8.2 or 8.4, depending on the examiner’s recommendation.

10.4. Non-Award

When both examiners recommend Non-Award or an examiner recommends Non-Award for a revised and resubmitted thesis, the Dean of Graduate Research will first review the report(s) and provide advice to the HDC. The examiner reports will be sent to the Chair for review and discussion with the primary supervisor and the candidate, after which time the Chair will provide a recommendation to the HDC.

(a) The HDC will discuss the report(s) and either recommend that the degree is not awarded, or in the case of a Non-Award recommendation for a PhD, the Committee may consider whether the candidate has satisfied the conditions for the award of a Masters by Research degree. The HDC may use an independent assessor to assist their deliberations (see Section 11).

(b) The HDC’s recommendation will be considered by the Dean of Graduate Research, after which the formal examination outcome will be communicated to the candidate, primary supervisor and Chair.

(c) The GRS will also provide the candidate with copies of both examiner reports. The candidate must be given written notification of the reasons for this recommendation.

10.5. Divergent Reports

In some examinations, there may be divergent reports where one examiner will recommend that the thesis has met the requirements (although it may require minor corrections or further work) and the other will recommend that the thesis is either not at the standard for the award of the degree or requires revision and re-examination. In such cases, the Dean of Graduate Research will review both reports to confirm they are correct procedurally and provide advice.

An oral examination will be required as part of the process to determine the final outcome and as such, the process detailed in Section 8.3 will then be followed and the examination outcomes detailed in Section 9 will apply. Before this process begins, the Dean of Graduate Research (or delegate) will convene a meeting of the Examination Panel to confirm the purpose of the oral examination and how it will be conducted. Once this meeting has occurred, the candidate and supervisors will be informed of the decision and the date of the oral examination will be determined.

11. Engagement of an Independent Assessor

In cases where independent advice on the examination is required, an assessor who is independent of the examination process may be appointed to aid the committee in its deliberations. The independent assessor must be nominated by the Chair, following
the examiner nomination procedures in Section 7, using the appropriate form as advised by the GRS.

The independent assessor can be tasked with:

- reviewing the examination process and providing advice to the HDC on whether the examination has been carried out in an appropriate manner, and/or
- providing a recommendation on whether the candidate could be permitted to revise their thesis to the appropriate standard or whether the award of an alternate degree is possible.

The independent assessor must submit their recommendation to the Dean of Graduate Research or their delegate.

11.1. Non-availability of Examiners

(a) In cases where re-examination is required, the original examiners may decline to re-examine the thesis. In such cases, the HDC should seek further advice on the revised thesis from an independent assessor (as described in Section 11).

(b) The independent assessor should consider all the material provided, weighing up the reports from the examiners. It should be noted that the assessor is not being asked to examine the thesis, but to consider all the material above and make a recommendation to the Dean of Graduate Research on the examination outcome.

12. Flowchart

Flowcharts outlining the process that the HDC follows to manage thesis examiners recommendations will be provided post University wide consultation.

13. Appeal of Examination Outcome

Where the examination process results in a ‘No-Award’ outcome, the candidate has the right to appeal to the UNSW Student Integrity Unit. This appeal may only be lodged on grounds of procedural fairness.
### Accountabilities

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<tr>
<th>Responsible Officer</th>
<th>Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research Training) and Dean of Graduate Research</th>
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<td>Contact Officer</td>
<td>Director, Graduate Research School</td>
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### Supporting Information

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<td>Master of Philosophy Conditions for Award Policy</td>
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### Related Documents

- Admissions Policy
- Admission to Higher Degree Research Programs Procedure
- Complaint Management and Investigations Policy and Procedure
- Roles and Responsibilities of Postgraduate Research Coordinators Guideline
- Higher Degree Research Supervision Policy
- Higher Degree Research Supervision Procedure
- Variation of Candidature Procedure
- Research Code of Conduct
- Intellectual Property Policy
- Open Access and UNSWorks Guidelines
- Plagiarism Policy
- Research Authorship and Publication Dispute Management Procedure
- Research - Handling Research Material & Data Procedure

### Superseded Documents

- Thesis Examination Procedure, version 3.5
- Oral Examination Procedure v1.0

### File Number

- 2012/01615

### Definitions and Acronyms

- ADRT: Associate Dean Research Training
- Chair: Chair of Examination Panel
- HDR: Higher Degree Research
- HDC: Higher Degree Committee
- PGC: Postgraduate Research Coordinator

### Revision History

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