Higher Degree by Research Thesis Examination Procedure

1 Purpose

To establish the process and requirements for examination of Higher Degree by Research (HDR) Theses at the University.

2 Scope

This Procedure applies to all HDR Students and Employees involved in the examination of an HDR Thesis.

3 Procedure Overview

This Procedure establishes the examination process, criteria for and grading of an HDR Thesis.

This Procedure aligns with:

- *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021*: Standard 1.4 Learning Outcomes and Assessment; Standard 4.2 Research Training.

4 Procedures

All HDR programs offered by the University include a Thesis component. Theses must be submitted for examination as a:

- Standard Thesis; or
- Thesis by Publication; or
- Thesis with Creative Works.

4.1 Examination requirements

- HDR Students must meet specific eligibility and minimum requirements before submitting their Thesis for examination. These requirements are detailed in the Higher Degree by Research Student Admissions and Enrolments Procedure and on the Graduate Research School (GRS) website.

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- HDR Students intending to submit their Thesis for examination must notify their principal HDR supervisor at least 20 University Business Days prior to submission.

- All Theses will include examination by at least one external examiner.

4.1.1 Oral examinations

HDR Students who enrol in doctoral programs after 1 January 2025 will be required to undertake an oral examination as part of the Thesis examination process. HDR Students enrolled prior to 1 January 2025 may elect to undertake an oral examination. Under such circumstances, the principal HDR Supervisor must request approval from the Dean (GRS). All oral examinations must take place in the English language.

4.2 Preparation of Thesis for Examination

HDR Students must complete the Statement by HDR Student Form available via the University website when ready to submit a Thesis for examination. This form is required to confirm willingness to be examined and to certify that the Thesis is the HDR Student's own, original work that has not been previously submitted for Assessment.

The principal HDR Supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the Thesis is suitable for examination, a check on integrity has been completed utilising University-approved software, and that it conforms to the HDR Thesis Presentation Schedule. The principal HDR Supervisor must provide written confirmation of this suitability by completing the Statement by HDR Supervisor Form available via the University website.

The HDR Student must provide both the Statement by HDR Student Form and Statement by HDR Supervisor Form with an examinable copy of the Thesis to the GRS prior to their Thesis submission due date. An examinable Thesis is defined as both endorsed by the principal HDR Supervisor and compliant with the HDR Thesis Presentation Schedule. After initial submission of the Thesis to the GRS, HDR Students will be advised of any adjustments required to the Thesis for compliance with the HDR Thesis Presentation Schedule. Students may be required to maintain active Enrolment until an examinable Thesis has been submitted.

4.2.1 Submission request without Supervisor approval

If the principal HDR Supervisor withholds approval for examination via the Statement by HDR Supervisor Form, the HDR Student may request that the Thesis be examined without the principal HDR Supervisor's approval via the Statement by HDR Student Form. The Dean (GRS) will consider the HDR Student's request and may seek further Information from the supervisory team, the HDR Coordinator, the HDR Student, or other parties to make a determination. The Dean (GRS) will inform the HDR Student of the outcome. If the Thesis is not approved for examination, the HDR Student may request a Review of Decision in accordance with the Student Grievance Resolution Procedure.

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4.3 Examiner Nomination

4.3.1 Nomination of Examiners

The principal HDR Supervisor is responsible for identifying and nominating three suitably qualified examiners by completing the Nomination of Examiners Form, available on the University website. The principal HDR Supervisor should confirm the prospective examiners' willingness and availability to examine the Thesis within the required timeframe. The identities of the nominated examiners should not be disclosed to the HDR Student.

Examiner nominations should be made in accordance with the Australian Council of Graduate Research (ACGR) Graduate Research Good Practice Principles, which stipulate that the Thesis examination must include examination from experts of international standing in the discipline. These experts should be external to the enrolling institution, independent of the research, and free from any real or perceived Conflict of Interest in their decision-making.

- For doctoral-level programs: All examiners must be external to the University.
- For masters-level programs: At least one examiner must be external to the University. Members of the HDR supervisory team are not eligible to act as examiners.

4.3.2 Nomination of Panel Chair

Once the HDR Student's Statement is received, the HDR Coordinator is responsible for identifying and nominating a panel chair for the oral examination process. The panel chair must:

- be a senior member of the University at academic level D or higher;
- be an Employee of the University; and
- have no direct involvement in the candidate's doctorate.

The nomination of the panel chair and examiners is reviewed by the GRS to ensure compliance with the ACGR Graduate Research Good Practice Principles before a recommendation is made to the Dean (GRS) for final approval.

4.3.3 Perceived Conflict of Interest

The principal HDR Supervisor must declare any actual or perceived Conflict of Interest regarding the proposed panel chair and/or examiners in accordance with the University's Conflict of Interest Policy and subordinate Policy Instruments. If there is a Conflict of Interest between a member of the HDR supervisory team and a nominated panel chair and/or examiner, an alternative panel chair and/or examiner(s) may be nominated.

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4.4 Thesis Submission to examiners

An HDR Student's candidature officially ends when their Thesis is submitted for examination. This occurs once the Thesis has been sent for examination by the GRS and the HDR Student has been notified.

The Thesis will be examined initially by two appropriately qualified examiners. In cases of significant discrepancies between examiners' Assessments, a third examiner will be appointed.

The Thesis is normally examined in electronic format.

The examination process related to the written Thesis is confidential. Communication between examiners is not normally permitted. If an examiner wishes to contact another examiner, a written request explaining the reasons for the interaction must be submitted to the GRS for a Decision by the Dean (GRS). Under no circumstances will an examiner's details be revealed to other examiners without their consent.

HDR Students who undergo a written examination may request the identities of their examiners once the examination process has concluded. The examiner's details will only be released if they have indicated in their examination report that they consent to their identity being disclosed to the HDR Student.

4.5 Thesis examination

The Thesis will be examined according to the following criteria:

- The extent to which the candidate has demonstrated:
    - originality;
    - critical insight; and
    - capacity to carry out independent Research.
- The extent of the contribution to knowledge and, in particular, to the understanding of the subject with which it deals.
- The suitability of the Thesis for publication.

Each examiner will award the Thesis one of the following grades. For Theses subject to an oral examination, the examination reports will include an interim Assessment of the written component. The final grading will be awarded after the oral examination, as detailed in Section 4.8.1.

Examiners are requested to return their examination reports within 30 University Business Days

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of receipt of the Thesis.

Grade	Grade notes	Resubmission due date*
Pass	HDR Student satisfies the requirements of the Academic Program with only typographical and similar corrections to be completed where indicated to the satisfaction of the supervisory team and HDR Coordinator.	10 University Business Days
Pass subject to minor revisions	HDR Student satisfies the requirements of the Academic Program subject to specified minor revisions being completed to the satisfaction of the supervisory team and HDR Coordinator. Minor revisions include rewriting sections of the Thesis without necessitating significant additional work.	Two months
Pass subject to major revisions	HDR Student satisfies the requirements of the Academic Program subject to specified major revisions being completed to the satisfaction of the HDR Coordinator-appointed review panel. HDR Students may need to re-enrol if required to undertake major revisions.	Six months
Resubmit with rewrite	HDR Student is required to revise the Thesis substantially and resubmit it for examination, normally by the original examiners. HDR Students may need to re-enrol if required to undertake major revisions.	Six months
Fail	Thesis is failed as it does not satisfy the requirements of the Academic Program. Students who receive a fail grade may be offered an alternative Award as per section 4.11 of this Procedure. HDR Student is not permitted to resubmit the Thesis for re-examination.	N/A

**** Due dates are calculated from the time of advice to the HDR Student. All timelines are as per the list in the table, unless specified otherwise in the examination report.***

4.5.1 Thesis by Publication examination

HDR Students may elect to present their Thesis in the form of Research papers published or presented for publication in peer-reviewed journals. The examination for a Thesis by Publication will follow the processes as outlined in section 3.5 of this Procedure.

4.5.2 Thesis with Creative Works examination

The examination process for a Thesis with Creative Works will follow the processes as outlined

in section 4.5 of this Procedure, with the following additional considerations:

1. The HDR Student is normally required to provide an electronic copy of the creative component. For projects that involve a major creative presentation, the examiners may also be required to attend in person. Reasonable costs will be met by the University. Costs should be identified and approved as part of the Confirmation of Candidature process. The attendance of examiners will be organised by the GRS.

2. Where examiners are required to attend an exhibition, the Exegesis and an electronic copy of the creative works should be submitted to the GRS at least 30 University Business Days prior to the visit by the examiners unless prior arrangements have been approved by the HDR Coordinator. In situations where it is not possible to submit an electronic copy with the Exegesis, a digital record must be provided to the GRS no more than 10 University Business Days after the date of the performance.

3. The HDR Student is responsible for the organisation and costs of all exhibitions and/or presentations.

4. Presentations/exhibitions should be outlined in detail and approved as part of the Confirmation of Candidature process. Exhibition/performance space will need to be finalised at the time of Confirmation of Candidature.

5. Informal discussion between examiners and the HDR Student and their supervisory team before, during, or after viewing the creative works does not constitute an oral examination.

4.6 Examiner returns and interim Assessment

Examiners will normally return an interim Assessment with a recommended grade and an examination report detailing feedback to the GRS. Once all reports are received, they will be collated and sent to the Dean (GRS) with a recommendation to approve the candidate to progress to the oral examination, if applicable.

For doctoral-level Theses where an oral examination is required, the interim recommended grade will be based on the aggregated grades from the individual examiners, calculated according to the matrix tables below to determine an overall grade. For Theses not subject to an oral examination (e.g., masters-level Theses or doctoral Theses submitted by students who enrolled before January 1, 2025), the Final Grade will be determined solely based on the examiner reports, as outlined in section 4.8.1.

The GRS will provide the interim Assessments and examination reports to the examiners and the panel chair. Examination reports will be shared with the candidate and their supervisory team only after the interim Assessments have been reviewed and approved.

4.6.1 Two examiner matrix

Decision matrix when two examiners are involved:

Examiners' Recommendations					Decision
Pass	**Minor revisions**	**Major revisions**	**Resubmit**	**Fail**	**Result**
2					Pass
1	1				Minor revisions
1		1			Minor revisions
1			1		Third examiner
1				1	Third examiner
	2				Minor revisions
	1	1			Minor revisions
	1		1		Major revisions
	1			1	Third examiner
		2			Major revisions
		1	1		Major revisions
		1		1	Resubmit
			2		Resubmit
			1	1	Resubmit
				2	Fail (this may result in the offering of an alternative Award)

4.6.2 Three examiner matrix

A third examiner will be appointed to address a significant variance in the examiners' recommendations, as per the table above. If a third examiner is appointed, the examiner will not have access to the other examiners' recommendations or written advice. The final Decision shall be based on the recommendation of the three examiners, as shown in the matrix below, with appropriate consideration of the comments provided to support the recommendations.

Decision matrix when three examiners are involved:

Examiners' Recommendations					University Decision
Pass	**Minor**	**Major**	**Resubmit**	**Fail**	**Result**

	revisions	revisions			
2			1		Pass
2				1	Pass
1	1		1		Minor revisions
1	1			1	Minor revisions
	2			1	Minor revisions
1		1	1		Major revisions
1		1		1	Major revisions
	1	1		1	Major revisions
1			1	1	Resubmit
	1		1	1	Resubmit
1			2		Resubmit
1				2	Resubmit
	1			2	Resubmit

In the event that there is disagreement between examiners, any revisions or resubmissions of the Thesis should take into account all comments of all examiners, even where the grade of one examiner is overridden by the grades of the other examiners.

4.7 Oral examination

For doctoral-level Theses submitted by HDR Students who enrol after January 1, 2025, an oral examination is required. Following the receipt of all examiner returns, the oral examination will be conducted online, typically within 15 University Business Days. The oral examination will include the candidate, two examiners, and the panel chair. Members of the candidate's supervisory team may attend as observers, based on the candidate's preference and discussion with their supervisory team. The oral examination will start with a 15-20-minute presentation by the candidate summarising the project and key findings. The use of presentation software and/or multimedia content is not permitted. This will be followed by up to two hours of questions and discussion directed by the panel chair.

4.8 Outcome

4.8.1 Thesis with oral examination

For doctoral-level Theses that require an oral examination, after the oral defence, the panel will evaluate both the interim Assessment and the oral examination to recommend an overall Final

Grade for the Thesis to the Dean (GRS). The panel chair will prepare an oral examination report for the Dean (GRS), which will include the recommendation and, if applicable, required revisions for Award completion, within 10 University Business Days of the oral examination. The Dean (GRS) will review and approve the outcome before notifying the HDR Student.

4.8.2 Thesis not subject to oral examination

For Theses not subject to an oral examination (typically for masters-level Theses or doctoral Theses submitted by students who enrolled before January 1, 2025), examiner reports will be collated and sent to the Dean (GRS) along with a recommendation for the overall grade, as outlined in section 4.5. Comments from the examiners supporting their recommended grades will also be considered. The Dean (GRS) will review and approve the overall grade before notifying the HDR Student.

4.9 Notification of outcome

The GRS will notify the HDR Student of the outcome of the Thesis examination process, including the nature and due date of any required revisions. The HDR Student must not be informed of the outcome by any other member of the University, including their supervisory team.

4.9.1 Revisions and re-examination

HDR Students may be required to revise their Thesis following examination. They must demonstrate clear and thorough engagement with all feedback provided by each examiner and prepare a summary document detailing how the Thesis has been revised in accordance with this feedback. HDR Students may choose to defend or amend sections of the Thesis based on examiner comments.

HDR Students are required to submit the revised Thesis, summary document, and written approval of the revisions from their HDR Supervisor to the GRS by the specified due date.

For minor revisions, the HDR Coordinator will review the revisions and summary document to ensure that feedback has been satisfactorily addressed. Failure to complete the required revisions by the due date may result in the HDR Student having to re-enrol for the next available Study Period and undergo performance management processes.

For major revisions or resubmissions, the HDR Student will need to complete the revisions to the satisfaction of an internal reviewer appointed by the HDR Coordinator. In these cases, the HDR Student must re-enrol in the next available Study Period(s) until the revisions are completed and/or the Thesis is resubmitted for examination.

If resubmission is required, examiners will be invited by the principal HDR Supervisor to re-examine the Thesis. Examiners will receive comments from other examiners without having their identities revealed. An additional honorarium will be provided for re-examination.

If an examiner declines to re-examine the resubmission, a new examiner will be nominated by

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the principal HDR Supervisor following the nomination of examiners process outlined in section 4.3.1 of this Procedure.

4.10 Completion of examination

Once a Thesis has been examined and the HDR Student has made suitable revisions to the satisfaction of the HDR Coordinator, the HDR Coordinator will recommend provisional awarding of the degree. This recommendation will be forwarded to the Dean (GRS) for approval and the HDR Student will be notified of the outcome. HDR Students will then be assessed for eligibility to graduate, in accordance with the Graduations Procedure.

4.11 Alternative Awards

In cases where the Thesis does not satisfy the requirements of a doctoral Academic Program, an HDR Student may be offered, on the recommendation of the examiners, one of the following:

- Accepted for a Research masters degree - the HDR Student satisfies the requirements of a research masters degree with only typographical and similar corrections to be made where indicated to the satisfaction of the supervisory team and the HDR Coordinator.
- Accepted for a Research masters degree subject to minor revisions - the HDR Student satisfies the requirements of a research masters degree subject to the specified minor revisions being completed to the satisfaction of the supervisory team and the HDR Coordinator.
- Unacceptable for a Research masters degree - the work has failed to satisfy the requirements of a Research masters degree and the HDR Student is not permitted to submit for re-examination for any HDR Award at the University.

4.12 Grievances

Students who wish to request a review of a Decision made by the University should do so in accordance with the Student Grievance Resolution Procedure.

5 References

Nil.

6 Schedules

This procedure must be read in conjunction with its subordinate schedules as provided in the table below.

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7 Procedure Information

Accountable Officer	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic and Research)
Responsible Officer	Dean (Graduate Research School)
Policy Type	University Procedure
Policy Suite	Higher Degree by Research Student Policy
Subordinate Schedules	Higher Degree by Research Thesis Presentation Schedule Higher Degree by Research Thesis Submission Schedule
Approved Date	2/12/2024
Effective Date	1/1/2025
Review Date	1/1/2030
Relevant Legislation	*Electronic Transactions Act 1999* Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 *Higher Education Support Act 2003*
Policy Exceptions	Policy Exceptions Register
Related Policies	Academic Programs and Courses Quality Policy Admissions, Enrolment and Graduations Policy Assessment Policy Code of Conduct Policy Conflict of Interest Policy Handling Personal Student Information Policy and Procedure Marketing and Brand Policy Privacy Policy Records and Information Management Policy Student Grievance Resolution Policy
Related Procedures	Assessment Procedure

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	Conflict of Interest Procedure Higher Degree by Research Student Admissions and Enrolments Procedure Higher Degree by Research Student Progress Procedure Privacy Procedure Student Appeals Procedure Student Grievance Resolution Procedure Website Procedure
Related forms, publications and websites	Australian Council of Graduate Research - Graduate Research Good Practice Principles HDR Forms Universities Australia
Definitions	**Terms defined in the Definitions Dictionary**
	Academic Program An approved Higher Education Award of the University, consisting of a combination of Courses the successful completion of an offering of which, together with any credit transfers and Exemptions in accordance with the relevant requirements, will fulfil the prescribed requirements for that particular Award. Assessment The process of evaluating the extent to which Students have achieved the Learning Outcomes of a Course. Award The qualification conferred upon a Student following the successful completion of an Academic Program. The categories of Award are listed in the Program Nomenclature Schedule . Conflict of Interest If a University Member has an interest that conflicts or may conflict with the discharge of the University Member's duties the University Member should Declare the nature of the interest and the conflict to the University Member's Supervisor as soon as practicable after the

relevant facts come to the University Member's knowledge and must not take action or further action relating to a matter that is or may be affected by the conflict until authorised. An Executive Leader may direct a University Member to resolve a conflict or possible conflict between an interest of the University Member and the University Member's duties. A reference to an interest or to a Conflict of Interest is a reference to those matters within their ordinary meaning under the general law, and, in relation to an interest, the definition in the Acts Interpretation Act 1954, Schedule 1, does not apply. A Conflict of Interest will arise when a University Member's Private Interests conflict with their duty to the University or to serve the public interest as a University Member. The risk of having a conflict of interest increases where a University Member's responsibilities include the authority to make decisions. A conflict of interest may be potential, perceived or actual - when a University Member is in a role where future decision making may be influenced by their Private Interests if a certain condition is fulfilled, they have a potential conflict of interest; a perceived conflict of interest arises where it appears that decisions a University Member make in the course of their University employment may be influenced by their Private Interests, whether or not this is in fact the case; an actual conflict of interest exists where a University Member's actions could be unduly, improperly or excessively influenced by their Private Interests. Serious misconduct can occur when a conflict of interest is concealed, understated, mismanaged or abused.

Decision

A determination made by an Employee, contractor or other authorised delegate in the course of their duties on behalf of the University.

Employee

A person employed by the University and whose conditions of employment are covered by the Enterprise Agreement and includes persons employed on a continuing, fixed term or casual basis. Employees also include senior Employees whose conditions of employment are covered by a written agreement or contract with the University.

Enrolment

The process of admitting Students to one or more Courses for the current Academic Year.

Exegesis

A form of written assessment that accompanies a Student's creative

works. The Exegesis will normally provide a rationale for the techniques and strategies adopted in the creative works and situate them in relation to the theoretical and/or historical cultural context.

Final Grade

A Final Grade is a code that normally represents the outcome of the Assessment of a Student's performance against the learning objectives of a Course but may reflect the outcome of an applicable administrative process.

Graduate

A Student upon whom Council has conferred an Award.

Grievance

Typically defined as a concern or Complaint raised by an Employee against a process, action, omission or Decision within the responsibility and control of the University which relates to employment or related internal People Portfolio matters, which has or is likely to have an unreasonable negative impact on the ability of an Employee to undertake their duties, or similar impact on their career.

Higher Degree by Research (HDR)

A Research Doctorate or Research Masters program for which at least two-thirds of the Student load for the program is required as research work.

Information

Any collection of data that is processed, analysed, interpreted, organised, classified or communicated in order to serve a useful purpose, present facts or represent knowledge in any medium or form. This includes presentation in electronic (digital), print, audio, video, image, graphical, cartographic, physical sample, textual or numerical form.

Policy Instrument

A Policy Instrument refers to an instrument that is governed by the Policy framework. These include Policies, Procedures and Schedules.

Research

Research is the creation of new knowledge and/or the use of existing

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knowledge in a new and creative way to generate new concepts, methodologies, inventions and understandings. This could include the synthesis and analysis of previous research to the extent that it is new and creative.

Review of Decision

A merits review of a Decision made by the University in relation to a Student matter where the relevant policy or procedure relating to the matter allows for a review of Decision. The Review of Decision will be undertaken in accordance with the Student Grievance Resolution Procedure.

Student

A person who is enrolled in a UniSQ Upskill Course or who is admitted to an Award Program or Non-Award Program offered by the University and is: currently enrolled in one or more Courses or study units; or not currently enrolled but is on an approved Leave of Absence or whose admission has not been cancelled.

Study Period

The period during which a Course or study unit is offered. Examples of Study Period include, but are not limited to, semesters, trimesters, blocks, intensives and sessions.

Thesis

Also known as a Standard Thesis, is the material outcomes of a program of research. It is also referred to as a 'dissertation'.

Thesis by Publication

A Thesis where some chapters are in the form of research papers published in, or submitted to, peer-reviewed journals.

Thesis with Creative Works

A Thesis with Creative Works includes original work such as multimedia, film, exhibition, performance, musical composition, novel, play or other Faculty approved production, in addition to an Exegesis.

University

The term 'University' or 'UniSQ' means the University of Southern Queensland.

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	University Business Days The days of Monday to Friday inclusive between 9am and 5pm Australian Eastern Standard Time (AEST), with the exclusion of gazetted Public Holidays for the relevant campus location, plus the closure of the University between 25 December and 1 January in the following year inclusive as specified in the Enterprise Agreement, as well as any closure of the University either at one or several campuses in accordance with a direction of the Crisis Management Team.
	Definitions that relate to this procedure only
Keywords	PhD, dissertation, Thesis, doctoral
Record No	15/1767PL

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