

Higher Degree by Research - Preparation, Submission and Examinations Procedure

Section 1 - Preamble

(1) Charles Darwin University (CDU) is committed to providing an environment that enables and supports transformative education through higher degrees by research (HDR) and drives world-class research in areas critical to the sustainable and prosperous development of Northern Australia and the wider region.

Section 2 - Purpose

(2) This procedure describes the principles and delegations that underpin the submission and examination of HDR theses at the University.

Section 3 - Scope

(3) The procedure applies to all HDR courses, HDR candidates, and University staff responsible for supporting HDR candidates and courses.

(4) This procedure does not apply to any coursework included in HDR courses, which is covered by the [Academic Assessment and Moderation Policy](#).

Section 4 - Procedure

Criteria to Determine the Suitability of Examiners

(5) Individuals can examine a thesis of a research candidate only if:

- a. they have attained a PhD or, in exceptional circumstances, have published work that evidently fulfils this criterion;
- b. they have completed significant research or scholarship in a field that overlaps with the thesis;
- c. they have either supervised or examined HDR candidates at this level;
- d. they are active in research or scholarship at the time of examination; and
- e. they are not biased by an actual, potential, or perceived conflict of interest.

(6) To ascertain whether examiners might be biased by a conflict of interest, Principal supervisors should consult the [Guidelines to Assess Conflicts of Interest](#).

Nomination of Examiners

(7) Before the thesis is submitted, the HDR candidate and supervisory panel should discuss and identify a pool of possible examiners. Ideally, this should be at least two months prior to the thesis being submitted.

- (8) The Principal Supervisor should contact the examiners using the guidelines [How to Contact Examiners](#).
- (9) Although the Principal Supervisor is responsible for selecting examiners, they should not choose an examiner who the candidate believes is not a suitable choice.
- (10) When the thesis is submitted, the Principal Supervisor should also submit the [HDR25 - Recommendation of Examiners Form](#) to the Faculty or Institute in which the candidate is enrolled (the Home Faculty), who must approve these examiners.
- (11) Although candidates may contribute to discussions about the choice of examiners, until the thesis is passed, the identity of examiners should remain confidential to both candidates and the other examiner.
- (12) At least one examiner should live outside Australia if the candidate is submitting a PhD thesis unless the Dean of Graduate Studies is convinced that only Australian academics would be appropriate to examine this thesis.

Presentation of Theses

- (13) The thesis should conform to the format and length that is stipulated on the relevant HDR webpage. In general:
- a. a PhD thesis cannot exceed 100,000 words, excluding appendices;
 - b. a Masters by Research thesis cannot exceed 50,000 words, excluding appendices; and
 - c. an exegesis should not exceed 50,000 words.
- (14) Candidates and supervisors should use their aesthetic judgment to determine the format of this thesis, such as the font and spacing.
- (15) If appropriate, candidates may choose to use a range of creative formats to convey their insights, including links to videos, audio, music, and maps.
- (16) Candidates should apply the guidelines [Organising Your Chapters](#) to determine whether the thesis contains all requisite content, including:
- a. a suitable title page, abstract, acknowledgements, and table of contents; and
 - b. a declaration stating that none of the material has been submitted as part of another degree or diploma, none of the material has been published before, except when acknowledged, and that a copy of this thesis will be available to access online, if applicable.
- (17) Candidates including any of their published works in their thesis should apply the guidelines [Thesis By Publication](#) to determine how to embed these publications appropriately. Candidates submitting a thesis by creative output should apply the guidelines in [Thesis By Creative Works](#) to clarify the expectations of an exegesis.

Editing of Theses

- (18) Supervisors, professional editors, and other individuals can offer feedback to improve and to edit theses, providing the level of intervention conforms to the Australian Standards for Editing Practice, as outlined in the guidelines on [Who Can Edit Your Thesis](#).
- (19) Candidates must acknowledge any editorial assistance received in the “Acknowledgements” section of their thesis.

Submission of Theses

- (20) Research candidates submit their thesis to the Research and Innovation unit in PDF format unless otherwise

required by the nature of the thesis. The thesis must be accompanied by a [HDR39 - Candidate's Thesis Submission Checklist and Declaration Form](#) signed by both the candidate and the Principal Supervisor. This form testifies that:

- a. the candidate has received the necessary ethics clearance, completed the minimum levels of training and development, and fulfilled other milestones;
- b. the thesis contains no material that has been submitted as part of any other degree or diploma at any university;
- c. the thesis contains no material that either the candidate or anyone else has published, except when this material is acknowledged in the thesis; and
- d. the supervisors believe the thesis is ready to submit.

(21) The Submission Declaration form may be revised following submission. For example, candidates may be instructed to accompany this form with a report that attests to the originality of this work, or they may be instructed to confirm that the research complies with specific regulations and guidelines.

(22) If the candidate wishes to submit the thesis but the Principal Supervisor does not believe the thesis is ready for submitting, the Dean of Graduate Studies will consult with the candidate, supervisors, and other relevant individuals and make a recommendation to the Research Committee. The committee will then determine whether the submission should proceed.

(23) If an examiner requests a physical copy of the thesis, Research and Innovation will ask the candidate to print a soft-bound copy.

Role of Examiners

(24) Examiners of standard theses will receive either the [Instruction to Examiners of PhD Theses](#) or the [Instruction to Examiners of Masters by Research Theses](#). These instructions state:

- a. the criteria that examiners should apply to evaluate the PhD or Masters by Research thesis, such as scholarly analysis, effective communication, significant contribution and, for PhDs, originality, as well as how to evaluate these criteria;
- b. how to write a report on the strengths of the thesis and any concerns to be addressed;
- c. how to decide which outcome to recommend, including pass, pass after typographical and writing errors are corrected, pass after substantive concerns are corrected, resubmit the thesis, or not be awarded the degree;
- d. how to indicate these decisions in the [Higher Degree by Research Examiner's Report Form \(PhD\)](#) or the [Higher Degree by Research Examiner's Report Form \(Masters\)](#);
- e. that, if possible, the thesis should be examined within two months of receipt;
- f. that examiners cannot communicate with each other, the candidate, or the supervisors before they submit the final report; and
- g. that although the University will endeavour to maintain confidentiality of the examiner's report, this cannot be guaranteed due to Freedom of Information legislation.

(25) If the contents of this thesis could affect social, national or industrial security or contains information that is commercially or culturally sensitive, examiners may need to sign a non-disclosure agreement before they receive the thesis.

(26) Examiners of theses by creative output will receive the [Instruction to Examiners of Thesis by Creative Work](#). Typically, the examiner will need to evaluate both the creative output, either in person or online, and the exegesis.

(27) Examiners should be invited to evaluate the creative output online unless this format would not enable the examiners to assess the work accurately. The Principal Supervisor should decide whether the creative output is

evaluated in person or online, as well as the location and time in which this creative output will be displayed, with guidance from other relevant individuals, such as the candidate, associate supervisors, or the Dean of Graduate Studies.

(28) While evaluating the creative output, the examiners cannot interact with one another, the supervisors or the candidate.

Alternative Examiners

(29) In some circumstances, the Home Faculty, in consultation with the Principal Supervisor, may need to submit the thesis to an alternative examiner. These circumstances include occasions in which:

- a. an examiner has not returned the report within a reasonable time, such as three months
- b. the examiner has breached an instruction, for example, contacting the candidate or supervisor or demonstrating a conflict of interest.

(30) In these circumstances, the Research and Innovation unit will submit the thesis to an alternative examiner. The Home Faculty will approve this examiner and the Principal Supervisor will invite the examiner.

Evaluation of the Examiner's Reports

(31) After the examiners submit their reports, the Home Faculty will convene an examination panel. This panel should also include:

- a. three or more university staff members who are research active, at least two of whom are registered as Principal Supervisors;
- b. someone who has expertise that overlaps with the contents of this thesis; and
- c. must not include someone who has supervised or worked closely with the candidate.

(32) The panel will apply the guidelines in [How to Evaluate the Reports of Examiners](#) to:

- a. resolve discrepancies between the comments of an examiner and the outcome this examiner recommended;
- b. resolve discrepancies between the recommended outcomes of two examiners;
- c. resolve discrepancies between the comments of two examiners; and
- d. formulate a recommendation to the Dean of Graduate Studies.

(33) If the discrepancy between the two examiners is large enough to preclude a fair decision, the Examination Panel may recommend that a third examiner assess the thesis.

(34) This recommendation should indicate whether the thesis needs to be revised and whether the University or examiners should evaluate this revision, and, if necessary, stipulate which part of the thesis should be revised.

(35) The recommendation should also outline instances in which panel members did not reach consensus. In these circumstances, the Dean of Graduate Studies will determine how to proceed.

(36) The University will pay examiners an honorarium once they submit their report. This honorarium must be paid directly to the examiner, or, if the examiner chooses, paid to discharge an ancillary cost of the HDR program, consistent with the [Commonwealth Scholarships Guidelines \(Research\) 2017](#).

Response to Recommendations

(37) If the panel recommends the thesis should be revised but not resubmitted to the examiners, the candidate should

be instructed to complete this revision within three months. The Dean of Graduate Studies may approve extensions to this deadline.

(38) The candidate must accompany the revised thesis with a document that addresses the concerns the examiners raised and justifies the revisions.

(39) The revised thesis will be deemed as passed once the Principal Supervisor and Faculty endorse this revision and the Dean of Graduate Studies approves this revision.

(40) If the panel recommends the thesis should be revised and resubmitted to the examiners the panel can decide that one or both examiners assess the thesis again, depending on the comments and preferences of these examiners. The candidate should be instructed to complete this revision within six months, although the Dean of Graduate Studies can approve extensions

(41) The candidate must accompany the revised thesis with a document that addresses the concerns the examiners raised and justifies the revisions. The revised thesis is then subjected to the standard examination procedure.

(42) If candidates do not submit the revisions on time, they may be invited to show cause as to why they should be permitted to submit their revision after this date. If the panel recommends that a PhD candidate should not be awarded the degree, the Dean of Graduate Studies should consult with relevant individuals, such as the Home Faculty and the supervisors, and then report to the Research Committee. The Research Committee may recommend that either:

- a. the candidate be granted further opportunities to revise the thesis; or
- b. the candidate be awarded a Masters by Research, either before or after the thesis is revised.

Display of Thesis

(43) After the degree has been conferred, the candidate must submit a final electronic copy of the thesis to the Research and Innovation unit. Candidates are not permitted to change the thesis that was deemed as passed unless they become aware of errors that could mislead readers substantially and receive approval from the Dean of Graduate Studies to correct these errors.

(44) The thesis will be accessible from a university repository unless the circumstances are exceptional. The thesis may remain confidential during a specific period (usually no more than 24 months) if, for example, the thesis is subject to conflicting agreements with other relevant bodies, such as a sponsor, or if the contents of this thesis could affect social, national or industrial security or contains commercially or culturally sensitive information, as judged by the Home Faculty or Dean of Graduate Studies.

(45) When candidates submit a thesis by creative output, they should also, whenever possible, submit a durable record of this creative output, such as video footage of an exhibition.

Section 5 - Non-compliance

(46) Non-compliance with Governance Documents is considered a breach of the [Code of Conduct - Staff](#) and [Code of Conduct - Students](#) is treated seriously by the University. Reports of concerns about non-compliance will be managed in accordance with the applicable disciplinary procedures.

(47) All staff members have an individual responsibility to raise any suspicion, allegation or report of fraud or corruption in accordance with the Fraud and Corruption Control Governance Framework, [Fraud and Corruption Control Policy](#) and [Whistleblower Reporting \(Improper Conduct\) Procedure](#).

Status and Details

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Responsible Executive	Steve Rogers Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation +61 8 89466890
Implementation Officer	Steven Greenland Dean of Graduate Studies
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Glossary Terms and Definitions

"Home Faculty" - The Faculty in which a Higher Degree by Research candidate is enrolled

"Faculty" - An organisational and academic unit in the University that delivers courses and conducts research.