Higher Degree by Research - Preparation, Submission and Examinations Procedure

Section 1 - Preamble

(1) Charles Darwin University ('the 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 Higher Education Coursework Assessment Policy and Procedure.

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;
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, or have been active in the last three years, in research or scholarship; and
e. they are not biased by an actual, potential, or perceived conflict of interest with the candidate or any member of the supervisory panel.

(6) Potential examiners should ideally be able to demonstrate current or recent (within the last three years) membership of an academic or eminent professional institution.

(7) Supervisors should review the Conflicts of Interest Policy and Conflicts of Interest Procedure to assess whether examiners might be biased by a conflict of interest. Further guidance is available in the Australian Council of Graduate Research Conflict of Interest in Examination Guidelines.

(8) The principal supervisor is responsible for ensuring no conflicts of interest exist between the proposed examiners and the panel members or the student. The principal supervisor must ask the potential examiners any actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest with the student.

(9) Additionally, the principal supervisor must ask students to disclose any conflicts of interest with anyone who should not examine their thesis.

Intention to submit and nomination of examiners

(10) To facilitate timely examination, two to three months prior to the submission, the student must submit an Intention to Submit form to the Office of Research & Innovation copied to the Principal Supervisor.

(11) Students are not permitted to nominate, contact, or know, ahead of examination, the identity of the examiners of their thesis. However, a student has a right to inform their supervisor of any persons they DO NOT want to examine their thesis. On the Intention to Submit form they may list examiners, disciplines or groups that they do not wish to examine their thesis. This may include an individual, political alignment or research methodology for example that may not be empathetic with their research.

(12) Once signed and submitted a notification will be sent to the supervisor to initiate the nomination of examiners process.

(13) The Principal Supervisor will contact possible examiners and invite them to examine the thesis.

(14) Although the Principal Supervisor is responsible for selecting examiners, they should not choose an examiner who the candidate believes is not suitable.

(15) No later than one month after receiving notification of the Intention to Submit, the Principal Supervisor must submit the Recommendation of Examiners Form found at HDR Forms and Codes to the faculty or Menzies School of Health Research in which the candidate is enrolled (the home faculty).

(16) The principal supervisor must disclose any actual, potential, or perceived conflict of interest between an examiner and the candidate or a member of the supervisory panel. An ADR Review Panel that comprises all faculty and Menzies ADRs, the Dean of Graduate Studies, and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Community Connection, and may include the Deputy Vice-Chancellor First Nations Leadership as required, will consider and review disclosed conflicts of interest.

(17) If the Faculty or Dean of Graduate Studies has any concerns about the suitability of an examiner, they may discuss these with the supervisor and may direct the supervisor to nominate alternate or additional examiners.

(18) Once the Faculty is satisfied that the nominated examiners are suitable, it will endorse the examiners.

(19) Until the thesis is passed, the exact identity of examiners should remain confidential to both candidates and the other examiner/s, except in the case of an oral examination.

(20) For PhD examinations, one examiner must live within Australia and one must live outside Australia, unless the principal supervisor presents a case that no appropriate alternative can be found. The home faculty and Dean of Graduate Studies will consider the case and may approve or reject it.

(21) The Dean of Graduate Studies will have final approval of the examiners. If the Dean of Graduate Studies has any concerns that the nominated examiners may affect the quality or integrity of the examination, they may direct the Supervisor and Faculty to nominate alternative or additional examiners.

Presentation of Theses

(22) The thesis should conform to the following format and length:

a. a PhD thesis cannot exceed 100,000 words, excluding appendices;
b. a Masters by Research thesis cannot exceed 50,000 words, excluding appendices;
c. an exegesis, as part of the artefact and exegesis doctorate, should not usually exceed 50,000 words; and
d. an exegesis, as part of the artefact and exegesis master, should not usually exceed 30,000 words.

(23) The format of the thesis will be determined by the platforms deployed in the artefact and the requirements of the exegesis to confirm an original contribution to knowledge.

(24) The thesis and/or other approved work must contain the results of the candidate's study and research.

(25) Candidates may choose to use a range of media platforms to further their research project.

(26) Candidates must include in their thesis:

a. a suitable title page, abstract, acknowledgements, and table of contents;
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; and
c. if they have used generative artificial intelligence (gen AI) tools, a description of which AI tools have been used, when and how they were used, and the effect of their use on the research process.

(27) Candidates including any of their published works in their thesis should specify where this material has been previously published, including precise citation details. Where co-authorship information, information must be included regarding the co-author roles and contributions.

(28) Candidates submitting a research artefact/object and exegesis PhD thesis must demonstrate how the two components of the research have configured a significant original contribution to knowledge.

(29) From 2026, all commencing HDR students will be required to undertake an oral examination as part of the course and examination requirements. Candidates who commenced pre-2026 may elect to undertake an oral examination.

Editing of Theses

(30) Supervisors, professional editors, and other individuals can offer feedback to improve and to edit theses, providing the level of advice conforms to the Australian Standards for Editing Practice. Gen AI use for editing must also conform with these standards.

(31) Candidates must acknowledge all editorial advice in the “Acknowledgements” section of their thesis.

Submission of Theses

(32) Research candidates submit their thesis to Research and Innovation in PDF format unless otherwise required by the nature of the thesis. The thesis must be accompanied by the Theses Submission Declaration & Approval found at HDR Forms and Codes 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 where the copyright holders provide permission for use of their work to be included in the thesis via this form;
d. The supervisors believe the thesis is ready to submit; and
e. The student ensures that their final thesis has undergone a similarity check via text matching software. The student, supervisor and Dean of Graduate Studies review the thesis and the report to ensure that academic and research integrity protocols and standards are in place.

(33) 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.

(34) 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.

(35) 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

(36) Examiners of standard theses will:

a. evaluate the quality of the PhD or Masters by Research thesis, including scholarly analysis, effective communication, significant contribution and, for PhDs, originality;
b. write a report on the strengths of the thesis and any concerns to be addressed;
c. decide which result they recommend from Table 1;
d. indicate these decisions in the forms provided;
e. examine the thesis within four to six weeks of receipt;
f. not communicate with each other, the candidate, or the supervisors before they submit the final report, except in the case of oral examination; and
g. note that although the University will endeavour to maintain confidentiality of the examiner's report, this cannot be guaranteed due to Freedom of Information legislation.

Table 1 – results recommendations

1	The degree to be awarded without further alteration to the thesis.
2	The degree to be awarded after the minor concerns of the examiners are corrected to the satisfaction of the University.
3	The degree to be awarded — but only after the substantive concerns of the examiners are corrected to the satisfaction of the University.
4	The candidate must complete further work and resubmit the thesis for examination.
5	The degree should not be awarded.

(37) If the contents of this thesis may impact 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.

Alternative Examiners

(38) 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; or
b. the examiner has breached an instruction, for example, contacting the candidate or supervisor or demonstrating a conflict of interest.

(39) 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

(40) After the examiners submit their reports, they will be reviewed by the Dean of Graduate Studies to ensure that any discriminatory language is redacted from the reports.

(41) The HDR Examination Coordinator will use Table 1 – results recommendations, and the following guidelines to evaluate the examiner reports and determine an examination outcome:

a. If both examiners recommend either results of a 1, 2 or 3, the outcome will be handled within the University, spanning from the student passing without correction to the student being required to make minor and major corrections to the thesis.
b. If both examiners recommend results of 4 or 5 as the outcome, further work will be required from the student. A re-examination will be required and the student will be required to re-enrol to make the corrections and enable the commencement of the next examination process. If both examiners recommend a 5, then the degree is not awarded.
c. When there is a 'split decision', that is, one examiner grades at a 1, 2 or 3, and the other grants a 4 or a 5, the thesis will be sent to a third examiner. In this situation, the reports are not delivered to the student or supervisors until the third examiner's report is received and considered by the DGS.
d. If the third examiner is engaged, once the third report is received, the HDR Examination Coordinator will consider the three reports and decide on the outcome as follows:
    i. If two of the three results are a 1, 2 or 3 then the overall result will be the lowest of those two; or
    ii. If two of the three results are 4 or 5, (and one is a 1, 2 or 3) then the result will be a 4 and the reports are released, and the student will be required to re-enrol to make the corrections to enable the commencement of the next examination process.

(42) Where re-examination is required, the rules outlined in the Re-examination and continuity of examiners section of this procedure apply.

(43) The examination outcome 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. The recommendation must include a time limit if any revisions are required to be made by the student. Exceptions may apply as outlined in the Re-examination and continuity of examiners section of this procedure.

Re-examination and continuity of examiners

(44) Where the examination outcome requires the thesis to be revised and re-examined, the revised thesis will normally be returned to all of the original examiners to ensure fairness, academic integrity, and continuity.

(45) Exceptions apply where:

a. an examiner is unavailable or unwilling to re-examine;
b. a conflict of interest arises or is identified; or
c. the Dean of Graduate Studies, on advice from the HDR Examination Coordinator or Faculty, determines that referring the revised thesis to an alternate examiner is necessary in the interests of fairness, academic integrity, or candidate wellbeing.

(46) In such cases, a replacement examiner will be appointed, and the reasons for substitution must be documented.

(47) The HDR Examination Coordinator will send the examination outcome along with examiner reports to the following, simultaneously, as soon as possible after receiving the reports used to determine the outcome:

a. Student;
b. Supervisor;
c. Associate Dean Research or equivalent.

(48) 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 Higher Education Support (Commonwealth Scholarships) Guidelines 2025.

(49) HDR theses normally receive only one formal opportunity for revision and re-examination following a failed or major-revision examination outcome. Where a thesis undergoes re-examination that results in a second failed or major-revision outcome:

a. the thesis will be failed; or
b. in exceptional circumstances, and at their sole discretion, the Dean of Graduate Studies may permit an additional re-examination process.

Response to Recommendations

(50) If the examiners' recommendation is for the thesis to be revised but not re-examined, the candidate must incorporate these recommendations into the thesis within three months. The Dean of Graduate Studies may approve extensions to this deadline.

(51) The candidate must accompany the revised thesis with a document that describes how they have accommodated the examiners' concerns and recommendations.

(52) The revised thesis will be deemed as passed once the supervisor, home faculty, and Dean of Graduate Studies are satisfied that this revision has effectively responded to the examiners' recommendations.

(53) 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.

(54) If the Dean of Graduate Studies 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

(55) 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.

(56) 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) as judged by the home faculty or Dean of Graduate Studies if, for example, the thesis is subject to conflicting agreements with other relevant bodies, such as a sponsor, if the contents of this thesis could affect social, national or industrial security or contains commercially or culturally sensitive information, or due to copyright issues.

(57) 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

(58) Non-compliance with Governance Documents is considered a breach of the Code of Conduct - Employees or the Code of Conduct - Students, as applicable, and is treated seriously by the University. Reports of concerns about non-compliance will be managed in accordance with the applicable disciplinary procedures outlined in the Charles Darwin University and Union Enterprise Agreement 2025 and the Code of Conduct - Students.

(59) Complaints may be raised in accordance with the Complaints and Grievance Policy and Procedure - Employees and Complaints Policy - Students.

(60) 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 Policy and Whistleblower Reporting (Improper Conduct) Procedure.

Status and Details

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Effective Date	23rd June 2026
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Approval Authority	Vice-President Governance and University Secretary
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Responsible Executive	Steve Rogers Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Community Connection +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. The Menzies School of Health Research is the home faculty for students of Menzies.

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

"University" - Charles Darwin University, a body corporate established under section 4 of the Charles Darwin University Act 2003. The University is comprised of the various faculties, CDU TAFE, organisational units, and formal committees, including the governing University Council and Academic Board.