Higher Degree by Research Examination (with Oral Examination) Procedure

Section 1 - Purpose and Scope

(1) This Procedure describes the process at The University of Queensland (UQ or the University) for Higher Degree by Research (HDR) examination for the award of PhD, MPhil and PDR degrees that require an oral examination. The award of an HDR degree is based on an assessment of the quality of the thesis and of the candidate's performance at the oral examination. External examiners with recognised disciplinary expertise make a written assessment of the thesis and participate in the oral examination. Following discussion with the external examiners, the Chair of Examiners makes an outcome recommendation to the Dean, Graduate Research School. The decision to recommend conferral of the degree is made by the Dean, Graduate Research School for approval by the Provost.

Section 2 - Process and Key Controls

(2) All HDR examinations must be conducted in accordance with the principles and requirements described in the Higher Degree by Research Examination Policy and those described in this Procedure.

(3) An overview of the process for HDR examination is illustrated in the flowchart in the Appendix.

Section 3 - Key Requirements

Thesis Format

(4) The thesis must be a coherent scholarly work that meets UQ standard for examination. Candidates should submit a thesis for examination in an approved format, suitable for their discipline and project. Approved formats can be viewed in the Higher Degree by Research Examination Guideline.

(5) To obtain permission to submit a thesis in a format not listed, the Principal Advisor should prepare a proposal for endorsement by the Head of the Academic Organisational Unit (AOU) to then submit to the Dean, Graduate Research School for approval. The process and criteria for this are outlined in the Guideline.

Nomination of the Chair of Examiners

(6) The Chair of Examiners is an academic staff member of the University who has sufficient domain knowledge relating to the topic of the thesis.

(7) The Principal Advisor nominates a Chair of Examiners with the endorsement of the Postgraduate Coordinator (PGC).

Nomination of Examiners

(8) Following the attainment of the Thesis Review Milestone and prior to thesis submission, the Principal Advisor nominates a minimum of three examiners. The candidate has an opportunity to review and comment on the

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nominations. Nominations of examiners must be endorsed by the PGC.

(9) All actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest (COIs) must be declared by the advisory team members and the candidate at the time of nomination of thesis examiners.

(10) The Dean, Graduate Research School will invite two nominated examiners to participate.

(11) Additional nominations from the Principal Advisor may be requested. All examinations should be treated as confidential. Where an additional level of legal protection is required, in the case of material that may be commercial-in-confidence, give rise to a patent, or be legally or culturally sensitive, then a request for a Confidentiality Agreement should be made at the time of nomination of examiners.

(12) Examiners will be advised to seek independent legal advice prior to signing the Confidentiality Agreement.

Requirements for Thesis Formatting

(13) The thesis should not exceed 80,000 words for a PhD or 40,000 words for an MPhil. The word limit includes all footnotes and appendices but not the bibliography. Requests to exceed this word limit must be approved by the Dean, Graduate Research School.

(14) Formatting should be: line spacing 1.5, Times New Roman or Arial 12pt font, all four margins 20mm.

(15) A thesis must adhere to the templates provided by the Graduate Research School.

Thesis Submission

(16) The thesis examination process is initiated when:

a. An approved Thesis Submission request has been received by the Graduate Research School.
b. The thesis and abstract have been uploaded to the University's digital repository as instructed by the Graduate Research School.

(17) An HDR candidate will maintain enrolment in the program until the oral examination is completed after which their enrolment status will change to 'under examination' until an outcome of the examination is determined. This enrolment status does not consume load and a tuition fee is not incurred.

(18) If an HDR candidate has submitted their thesis and has been enrolled for 4 years FTE, but not yet completed the oral examination, then they will be placed 'under examination'. For a candidate who has not submitted their thesis by 4 years FTE enrolment, a review of candidature may be conducted in accordance with the Higher Degree by Research Candidature Procedure (section 3).

(19) Where a candidate requests permission to submit without the Principal Advisor's approval, the candidate must make a written case to the Dean, Graduate Research School. Following consultation with the Head of the enrolling AOU, PGC and Principal Advisor, a decision will be made by the Dean, Graduate Research School.

Examination

(20) The examination comprises a review of the thesis and an oral examination.

Examination of Thesis

(21) All examiners are provided access to an electronic copy of the thesis by the Graduate Research School.

(22) Examiners are asked to assess the thesis document against the following quality measures:

a. Does the thesis demonstrate a significant and original contribution to knowledge (PhD) or show originality in the application of knowledge (MPhil)?
b. Does the thesis engage with the literature and the work of others?
c. Does the thesis show an advanced knowledge of research principles and methods relating to the applicable discipline?
d. Is there a clear and discernible coherence in the presented research, its arguments and conclusions?
e. Is the thesis convincingly written?

(23) Examiners are requested to return their written reports along with the summary form within 5 weeks of receiving the thesis. Once both reports are received, they will be distributed to the Chair of Examiners and the candidate.

(24) After the requisite time period the Dean, Graduate Research School may elect to replace an examiner if there has been undue delay in receiving the examiner's report.

Oral Examination

(25) The oral examination panel is comprised of:

a. The Chair of Examiners; and
b. Examiners – examiners may participate in person or using video conferencing. The examination may proceed with the approval of the Dean in exceptional circumstances with one examiner and comments from the second examiner if the attendance of both examiners is not possible (all reports must be taken into consideration).

(26) The advisory team does not form part of the examination panel.

(27) Examiners are asked to assess the candidate's performance in the oral examination against the following quality measures:

a. Did the candidate demonstrate detailed knowledge of the thesis?
b. Did the candidate demonstrate an understanding of their research in the broader context of their discipline?
c. Was the candidate able to defend the methodology and conclusions of the thesis and display an awareness of any limitations?
d. Did the candidate effectively communicate the results of the research in terms of impact and application of new knowledge?
e. Did the candidate as an individual demonstrate a substantive and independent contribution to the discipline?

Examination Outcomes

Possible Outcomes from the First Examination

(28) The candidate be awarded the degree without further changes.

(29) The candidate be awarded the degree, without further examination, after the changes (see Thesis Corrections – clauses 36 to 38) required by examiners have been made to the satisfaction of the Chair of Examiners and the Dean, Graduate Research School.

(30) The candidate not yet be awarded the degree but be allowed to repeat the oral examination component in response to the comments and recommendation of the oral examination panel. Before the degree is awarded, the candidate must also make any changes to the thesis required by the examiners to the satisfaction of the Chair of Examiners and the Dean, Graduate Research School.

(31) The candidate not yet be awarded the degree but be allowed to submit for re-examination a thesis revised in

response to the comments and recommendations of the examiners (see Revise and Resubmit – clauses 43 to 50), which may also require a repeat of the oral examination.

Possible Outcomes from a Second Examination

(32) The candidate be awarded the degree without further changes.

(33) The candidate be awarded the degree, without further examination, after the changes (see Thesis Corrections – clauses 36 to 38) required by examiners have been made to the satisfaction of the Chair of Examiners and the Dean, Graduate Research School.

(34) The candidate be awarded an MPhil (for a PhD re-examination only) - the candidate has not demonstrated a contribution to knowledge that is of sufficient significance or originality for a PhD but fulfils the criteria for an MPhil.

(35) Fail - the thesis is not of the appropriate standard for the award of any Higher Degree by Research and/or the candidate has not adequately met the expectations for the oral examination component.

Thesis Corrections

(36) Corrections to the thesis in response to an outcome requiring changes but no further examination are required to be completed within 3 months.

(37) The enrolling AOU will forward a fully endorsed Recommendation to Confer Degree to the Dean, Graduate Research School once satisfied the candidate has made the changes requested by the examiners or satisfactorily defended on academic grounds the absence of changes.

(38) A candidate can request a 3-month extension to complete the thesis corrections. Candidates who do not submit their thesis corrections for review following this extended period may be withdrawn from the program without academic penalty.

Repeating the Oral Examination

(39) If a candidate is required to repeat the oral component of the examination, this must be undertaken within 3 months of notification.

(40) The oral examination will be repeated with the Chair of Examiners and both original examiners, whenever possible.

(41) If an examiner is unable to participate in the repeat of the oral examination, a replacement examiner will be nominated by the Principal Advisor and appointed by the Dean, Graduate Research School.

(42) Upon repeating the oral examination, the possible outcomes are listed at clauses 32 to 35 – Possible Outcomes from a Second Examination.

Revise and Resubmit

(43) When a candidate is required to revise the thesis and repeat the examination, they will have up to 12 months to do so.

(44) Following revision of the thesis, the submission process – as outlined in Thesis Submission clauses 16 to 19 – is repeated.

(45) Both the written and oral components of the examination are repeated.

(46) If either of the original examiners is unable to continue to participate, a replacement examiner will be nominated

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by the Principal Advisor and appointed by the Dean, Graduate Research School.

(47) Examiners will be sent the revised thesis, the examiners' original reports (including oral examination report if applicable) and the candidate's response to the examiners' comments.

(48) Where the examiners disagree on the examination outcome following revision of the thesis, the Dean, Graduate Research School may appoint a third examiner nominated by the Principal Advisor. This examiner is appointed to provide an independent assessment of the thesis and will not be provided with the original examiners' reports. All three reports will then be considered by the Dean, Graduate Research School in determining an examination outcome.

(49) The possible outcomes for the examination are described from clauses 32 to 35 – Possible Outcomes from a Second Examination.

(50) Candidates who are not able to resubmit their thesis for examination within 12 months of the first examination, may request an extension.

Meeting Degree Requirements

(51) Once a candidate has fulfilled the requirements of the examination process, the Graduate Research School will direct the candidate to confirm their thesis title and 100-word abstract. Once this is completed, the candidate will receive confirmation from the Graduate Research School that degree requirements have been met.

Access to a Thesis

(52) Upon submitting the thesis for examination, a candidate must indicate whether they intend to have the thesis made available immediately upon conferral as Open Access or to apply for an Embargo placed on access on the basis of academic, cultural, ethical, legal or commercial reasons. The application must be supported by the candidate's Principal Advisor and must be approved by the Dean, Graduate Research School. The Dean will consider the principles for academic freedom when determining whether or not to embargo a thesis, which recognise the importance of academic freedom and the right to disseminate, and only deny this in limited circumstances where there is a compelling case. If approved, the embargo will be set for a 3-year period in the first instance. Where the candidate and Principal Advisor have differing views on the selection of the access option, the matter will be referred to the Dean for determination.

(53) In circumstances where a candidate has transferred their IP to the University, after consultation with the candidate, the Principal Advisor will make a recommendation to the Dean, Graduate Research School on the thesis access arrangements, taking academic, cultural, ethical, legal and commercial factors into consideration. In cases where the Principal Advisor is not employed by the University, a recommendation will be sought from the Head of the AOU.

(54) Every three years for theses under Embargo, the Graduate Research School will contact the thesis author, or the Principal Advisor in the case where IP has been transferred to the University, to advise that the Embargo period is due for review. Where the Principal Advisor is not employed by the University, the matter will be referred to the Head of the enrolling AOU for a recommendation.

(55) Requests for renewal of the Embargo will be considered by the Dean, Graduate Research School. In the absence of an approved request for an Embargo extension, a thesis will transfer to Open Access.

(56) The University's responsibilities, together with any relevant academic, cultural, ethical, legal or commercial factors will be considered when determining whether a request for an Embargo extension will be approved.

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Section 4 - Roles, Responsibilities and Accountabilities

Provost

(57) The Provost approves the conferral of the degree, upon recommendation from the Dean, Graduate Research School.

Dean, Graduate Research School

(58) The Dean, Graduate Research School (or their delegate) decides on the examination outcome of the HDR candidate and provides recommendation for the conferral of the degree to the Provost.

Chair of Examiners

(59) The Chair of Examiners is a UQ staff member that provides academic oversight of the HDR examination process, including the oral examination, as described in the Higher Degree by Research Examination Guideline.

(60) The Chair of Examiners provides outcome recommendations to the Dean, Graduate Research School and oversees the oral examination component, where applicable.

Principal Advisors

(61) Principal Advisors are approved UQ staff members that take primary academic responsibility for the candidate during their candidature.

(62) The detailed academic role, accountabilities and eligibility for Principal Advisors are specified in the Eligibility and Role of Higher Degree by Research Advisors Policy.

Advisors

(63) Advisors are suitably qualified persons who provide expertise related to the candidate's research and are available to provide advice throughout candidature.

(64) The detailed academic role, accountabilities and eligibility for Advisors are specified in the Eligibility and Role of Higher Degree by Research Advisors Policy.

Section 5 - Monitoring, Review and Assurance

(65) Review of, and compliance with, this Procedure is overseen by the Dean, Graduate Research School and the Academic Board's Higher Degree by Research Sub-Committee.

Section 6 - Recording and Reporting

(66) All thesis examination transactions, activities and approvals are recorded within UQ's student system.

(67) All student records including final outcome, applications and University decisions are filed in the student's electronic record.

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Section 7 - Appendix

Flowchart Describing Examination Process

(68) The linked flowchart describes the examination process.

Definitions, Terms and Acronyms

Term	Definition
Advisor	Suitably qualified person who provides expertise related to the candidate's research and is available to provide advice throughout candidature.
AOU	An Academic Organisational Unit that directly enrols HDR candidates.
Chair of Examiners	UQ staff member who provides academic oversight of the examination process, including the oral examination, as described in the Higher Degree by Research Examination Guideline.
COI	Conflict of Interest declared so that a thesis may be assessed free from bias or preferential treatment (see Higher Degree by Research Examination Guideline).
Dean	Dean of the Graduate Research School or delegate.
Examiner	An experienced researcher with expertise in the relevant discipline who is not a UQ staff member and has been approved in accordance with the Higher Degree by Research Examination Guideline relating to COI.
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent.
HDR	Higher Degree by Research comprising MPhil, PhD and PDR.
MPhil	Master of Philosophy.
Open Access Thesis	Thesis publicly searchable and available via the internet.
PDR	Professional Doctorate by Research.
PGC	Postgraduate Coordinator.
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy.
Principal Advisor	Approved UQ staff member who takes primary academic responsibility for the candidate during their candidature with their role and eligibility outlined in the Eligibility and Role of Higher Degree by Research Advisors Policy and Procedure.
Thesis	The material outcomes of a sustained program of supervised research undertaken by a candidate whilst enrolled in an HDR program.

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