Purpose and Scope

This document describes the thesis examination procedures for all Higher Degree Research (HDR) Programs. It applies to all research candidates, supervisors, committees and other positions responsible for the management of HDR Programs. This procedure should be read in conjunction with the Excelsia College Policy for Examination of HDR Theses and Policy for the Presentation of HDR Theses by Publication.

Pre-submission Procedures

1. Restricted access to thesis: If the candidate and supervisory panel wish to request restricted access to the thesis for a period after the examination process is completed due to concerns about confidentiality or intellectual property, they must put their request in writing to the Research Committee at least four months before thesis submission.

2. Submission of PhD by a series of publications: Approval must be sought from the Research Committee to submit a PhD thesis in the form of a series of publications at least four months prior to the expected date of submission.

3. Notification of intention to submit: Notification of intention to submit a thesis for examination must be given to the Research Committee at least two months prior to the expected submission date. The Principal Supervisor is to complete the Intention to Submit PhD Thesis form that includes the Principal Supervisor’s endorsement that the thesis is ready for examination. The Intention to Submit PhD Thesis form also requires the supervisory panel to nominate at least three external examiners with contact details, CVs, and reason for each nomination.

Pre-submission Procedures

1. Length of thesis: There is no prescribed length for HDR theses. However, it is expected that theses would normally comprise between 60,000 and 100,000 words. If a thesis exceeds 100,000 words there must be written justification for its length, endorsed by the Principal Supervisor, and approved by the Research Committee.

2. Language of thesis: Unless otherwise approved in exceptional circumstances, the language of the thesis will be English.

3. Referencing: The thesis must include citations for all sources. Since styles of referencing vary between disciplines, candidates should use the referencing style used most commonly in the discipline in which they are enrolled. That discipline-based referencing style must be used consistently throughout the thesis.
4. Format of thesis: The text of a thesis is to be typed on a word processor using a standard font such as Times New Roman in 12 point size. Lines should be given 1.5 spacing with paragraphs separated by one additional line. The thesis should incorporate in the following order:

(a) A title page, giving the title of the thesis in full, and a statement setting out: the degree for which the thesis is submitted, the name of the candidate, the School in which the candidate is enrolled, the name of Excelsia College in full, and the year of submission.

(b) A table of contents.

(c) A summary (abstract) of not more than 200 words at the master’s level or 350 words at the doctoral level. The abstract should indicate the problem investigated, the procedures followed and the general results obtained and the major conclusions reached, but should not contain any illustrative or identifying matter.

(d) A signed statement to the effect that the thesis is the candidate’s own work and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution. The statement should affirm that, to the best of the candidate’s knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis. Where the work in the thesis is based on joint research or publications, explicit disclosure of the relative contributions of the respective authors should be made in the statement.

(e) An acknowledgment of any help given or work carried out by another person or organisation.

(f) The main text.

(g) Appendices, if any.

(h) A list of references (if not included as footnotes).

Diagrams should be included at the appropriate place in the text. Tables should also be included in the appropriate place in the text, except that lengthy or bulky tables should be provided as appendices. Diagrams, maps, tables, etc. exceeding A4 size should be folded so as to read as a right hand page when open as an appendix.

5. Number of copies and binding for examination: Masters Honours candidates must submit three copies of their thesis; PhD candidates must submit four copies. Copies are to be in printed form and bound using a temporary form of binding such as thermal binding or spiral binding.

6. Permanent binding: At the completion of the examination and prior to graduation, every candidate who has satisfied requirements for the award of the HDR will submit a final bound paper copy and a digital copy for deposit and preservation in the Gordon Moyes Library, one bound copy for the Principal Supervisor, and one bound copy for the School/Research Centre for display and onsite use. Candidates may order additional bound copies for their personal use. The final thesis copies must be sewn and bound with stiff covers covered with cloth. During binding the edges should be trimmed. On the spine of the thesis there should be printed in gold lettering of suitable size, reading from top to bottom, the name of the candidate (initials and last name), the title of the thesis, abbreviated if necessary, and the year of submission.
7. Certification and availability of thesis: When the final bound copies are submitted, the copies will be accompanied by signed statements to the effect that:

(a) this is the final version of the thesis;
(b) Excelsia College is granted the right to make the thesis available through the Gordon Moyes Library;
(c) the candidate retains all property rights and the right to use the thesis in whole or part in future written works; and
(d) Excelsia College is granted the right to use the 350 word abstract for notification in *Dissertation Abstracts International* in the case of PhD theses.

8. Copyright: Where part of the thesis contains work which the candidate has had accepted for publication, or published, details of all publications must be clearly stated and appropriate copyright permissions obtained.

**Selection of Examiners**

1. Nominations by Principal Supervisor: At least three months prior to submission of a thesis for examination the Principal Supervisor should meet with the candidate and supervisory panel to discuss potential examiners. The candidate should provide names of any potential examiners about whom they have concerns with respect to the examination process. Where possible, such persons of concern will not be recommended as potential examiners by the Principal Supervisor. The Principal Supervisor will provide details of at least three potential examiners to the Research Committee as part of the Notification of Intention to Submit process (see Pre-Submission phase point 3). The details will comprise: full names, positions and contact information; CVs; and full reasons for their nomination, including their suitability for the particular thesis in light of the potential contributions of other nominees. The Principal Supervisor will also inform the Research Committee in writing of any persons of concern, as identified by the candidate.

2. Initial contact with potential examiners by the Principal Supervisor: The Principal Supervisor will contact potential examiners to determine their availability for thesis examination. Information provided to potential examiners will comprise: the topic or title of the thesis; the abstract; 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 relevant Excelsia policies and procedures for HDR examination. If any potential examiner is unavailable, the Principal Supervisor will nominate an alternative and check their availability until at least two (for Masters level theses) or three (for doctoral level theses) suitable nominees are available to act as examiners.

3. Consideration by Research Committee: The Research Committee will review the nominations at least 2 months prior to the submission date and seek advice, as appropriate, from the Head of School, supervisory panel, and other experts. The Research Committee will assess if there is any conflict of interest to ensure that the thesis is examined independently, and without bias or preferential treatment. The Research Committee will also review the nominees to ensure they meet criteria for HDR examiners, namely externality, qualifications and academic reputation, as noted in the *Policy for Examination of HDR Theses*. 
Lodgement of the Thesis

1. Supervisor approval: The Principal Supervisor must review the thesis to assess whether it is in a format suitable for examination and confirm that the abstract accurately represents the thesis. These approvals are not an endorsement that the thesis will pass examination.

2. If a Principal Supervisor, following advice from the other members of the supervisory panel, does not approve thesis submission they must advise the candidate and Research Committee in writing of the reasons for this assessment.

3. If a candidate wishes to submit the thesis against the recommendation of the supervisory panel, the Research Committee will consider submissions from the supervisors and the candidate, to determine whether the thesis will be submitted for examination and if not, what action should be taken.

4. If the Committee determines that the thesis be examined against the recommendation of the supervisory panel, they may review the nominations for examiners and replace any nominees with other suitably qualified examiners in order to ensure a fair assessment of the thesis.

5. Hard copies of the thesis, in temporary binding, must be lodged with the Research Office. One copy will be retained as reference/back-up copy, and the others will be sent to examiners.

Correspondence with Examiners

1. At the time the thesis is sent, the following information is provided to examiners by the Research Office: a letter confirming the request to examine a thesis; information regarding timelines for the examination, honoraria, conditions for the award of the degree, and notes for examiners of HDR theses; a thesis receipt form; payment form; and thesis report form.

2. As a general principle, examiner identity remains confidential until reports of the examination are submitted and considered. Candidates who infer an examiner’s identity and supervisors who are aware of the examiners’ identities, are not permitted to correspond with examiners during the examination process. If examiners have questions about the process they are advised to contact the Research Office for clarification.

3. The identity of examiners will not be disclosed to the candidate on receipt of examiners’ reports if anonymity is requested in the examination report or if the Research Committee determines that it would be in the interests of the College to withhold the name. However, in all other cases the candidate may request permission from their Principal Supervisor to correspond with examiners after receipt of reports in order to clarify comments or otherwise engage in academic discussion. The Principal Supervisor is advised to confirm the examiner’s availability for such correspondence where the examiner has waived anonymity.

Examination Process and Timelines

1. The thesis will be sent by the Research Office to confirmed examiners within ten days of submission. Examiners are asked to confirm receipt of the thesis and their availability to provide a report by the due date.
2. Examiners are asked to send their report by a specific date no later than ten weeks after the date of posting the thesis. A reminder will be sent by the Research Office two weeks before the due date.

3. If reports are not received by the due date the Research Committee will review the situation and either
   a. re-negotiate a due date within a reasonable period, or
   b. release that examiner and arrange to send the thesis to the reserve examiner.

4. The Research Committee will review the examiners’ reports as soon as possible after the last report is received by the Research Office.

5. If all examiners recommend that the degree be awarded with or without minor amendments of an editorial nature, the Research Committee may endorse the initial examination outcome and report its finding to the Registrar’s Office for communication to the candidate.

6. If one or more examiners recommend some re-writing or a major revision with resubmission, the Research Committee will seek the advice of the Principal Supervisor who will recommend specific amendments and a timeframe for the revision or resubmission. The timeframe will normally not exceed one semester. The Research Committee will authorise a letter to the candidate in which specific directions for revision or resubmission within a designated timeframe are given.

7. In the case of a recommendation to revise and resubmit the thesis for examination, the Research Committee will determine whether the revised and re-examined thesis has satisfied the conditions for the award of the degree and to do this may seek further advice on the examiners’ reports and the revised thesis from an external arbiter, or panel of assessors.

8. If one or more examiners recommends the degree not be awarded the Research Committee may recommend the awarding of a Research Master degree to the Academic Director. In this instance the thesis may require resubmission and re-examination for the Research Masters award.

9. If there is substantial disagreement amongst the examiners, or the result is otherwise unclear, the Research Committee may appoint an additional examiner or arbiter; invite the examiners to confer with each other and/or with the Research Committee with a view to the presentation of a consolidated recommendation; and/or direct the candidate to undertake such further oral, written or practical examinations as the Research Committee may specify. Such processes will be undertaken in a timely manner so that a final result can be available within one semester.

**Appealing a Result**

Procedural appeals against thesis examination may be made in writing to the Academic Director (or delegate), who will review the appeal. Grounds for procedural appeal will normally be restricted to irregularities in the conduct of an examination. In all appeals, the decision of the Academic Director (or delegate) shall be final.
References Consulted

UNSW Thesis Examination Procedures (2012)


For appeals see UWS Research higher degrees appeals policy (2006)

Document Status

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<td>Academic Board</td>
<td>11 December 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Publication</td>
<td>Issue 2E</td>
<td>20 March 2015</td>
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<td>Review Date</td>
<td>Review of Issue 2E</td>
<td>11 December 2017</td>
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