
Version	5.0
Short description	Procedure for the examination of PhD and MPhil thesis
Relevant to	Higher Degree Research candidates and supervisors
Authority	Academic Board
Policy Owner	Director Higher Degree Research
Responsible office	Research Services
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Related Avondale documents	HDR Rules of Candidature HDR Supervision Code of Conduct Intellectual Property Policy HDR Thesis Style Guide
Related legislation	ACGR Disclosing and Managing Interests in Graduate Research
Key words	candidate, conferral, examination, HDR, MPhil, PhD, progression, research, thesis, Turnitin

1. PURPOSE

1.1 This document outlines Avondale University (Avondale) procedures relating to the examination of a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) or Master of Philosophy (MPhil) thesis.

2. SCOPE

2.1 This procedure applies to all Higher Degree Research (HDR) candidates and supervisors.

3. REFERENCES

3.1 This procedure should be read in conjunction with:

- HDR Thesis Style Guide
- Intellectual Property Policy
- HDR Rules of Candidature
- HDR Supervision Code of Conduct

4. DEFINITIONS

4.1 **Adjunct:** often a retired previous staff member, an adjunct contributes to Avondale through ongoing collaboration, but is not employed by Avondale.

4.2 **Conjoint:** often a previous staff member, a conjoint contributes to Avondale through ongoing collaboration, but is employed by another institution.

4.3 **Examiner:** an academic who has been engaged by Avondale to examine a thesis after meeting the requirements outlined in Section 7.3.

4.4 **HDR candidate (candidate):** a Higher Degree Research (HDR) student who is enrolled in the Doctor of Philosophy or Master of Philosophy.

5. THESIS STRUCTURE

5.1 The thesis will be structured according to the *HDR Rules of Candidature*.

6. THESIS SUBMISSION

Intention to submit

6.1 At least one month prior to submission of the thesis for examination, the Principal Supervisor is required to submit an Intention to Submit Form to Research Services.

6.2 The completed form supplies the following information:

- a. Intended full title of the thesis;
- b. Expected submission date;
- c. Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement (AHEGS);
- d. Endorsement from the Principal Supervisor indicating they believe the candidate has satisfactorily completed all requirements for the degree; and
- e. Suggested names of potential examiners from the candidate and Principal Supervisor. Candidates may also suggest, and provide reasons for, the names of

persons considered to be inappropriate as potential examiners. If the Principal Supervisor or Director Higher Degree Research (Director HDR) believe the candidate's preference to exclude a potential examiner should be set aside, they must indicate their decision in writing to the Research Committee.

Lack of endorsement

- 6.3 If the Principal Supervisor does not believe the thesis is ready for examination and advises the candidate against submission, the supervisor is not obliged to sign the Intention to Submit Form and will advise the Research Committee in writing as to the reasons for withholding support.
- 6.4 The Principal Supervisor cannot prevent the candidate submitting the thesis as a candidate has the right to submit their thesis at any time after the minimum length of candidature timeframe has been reached.
- 6.5 If the candidate submits the thesis against the Principal Supervisor's advice, the candidate will accept full and sole responsibility for the outcome.
- 6.6 Should the Principal Supervisor not endorse the candidate's decision to submit the thesis for any reason other than failure to satisfactorily complete the requirements of the degree, the candidate may appeal to the Research Committee.

Academic integrity

- 6.7 Prior to submission for examination:
 - The candidate must ensure they have signed the 'Statement of Original Authorship' and the 'Statement of Copyright' at the beginning of their thesis (see 'Certification' on page ii of the *HDR Thesis Style Guide*);
 - The candidate must upload their thesis to Turnitin via the HDR Hub on Moodle for academic integrity assessment;
 - The Principal Supervisor must check the Turnitin report to ensure the thesis is free of any academic integrity concerns; and
 - The Principal Supervisor will notify Research Services in writing to confirm the thesis has passed the academic integrity check and is ready to be sent to examiners.

Submission for examination

- 6.8 The thesis must be seen in its final form by the Principal Supervisor.
- 6.9 The candidate is required to submit the thesis in both Word and .pdf format to Research Services. Research Services will coordinate the examination process.
- 6.10 The candidate is responsible for the content and formatting of the final version of the thesis that is submitted for examination.

7. APPOINTMENT OF EXAMINERS

- 7.1 Three examiners are required to examine a PhD thesis. Typically, three examiners are also required for an MPhil thesis.
- 7.2 Suggested examiners listed on the Intention to Submit Form must be external to Avondale, and at least two of the three must have international standing in their field.
- 7.3 Preference will be given to examiners who have not examined an Avondale HDR thesis for the past two years.

- 7.4 In making the decision to approve examiners, the Director HDR will consider the prospective examiner's qualifications, supervisory experience, examination experience, and their expertise in the candidate's substantive area. Each of the approved examiners will be from different institutions.
- 7.5 In cases where a suggested examiner does not have prior HDR supervision experience, prior HDR examination experience, is not member of a university or research institution, or does not have a doctorate, the Director HDR will consult the Research Committee as to whether the suggested examiner could mark a thesis to a satisfactory standard.
- 7.6 When the suggested names have been approved by the Director HDR, the Principal Supervisor may approach each potential examiner regarding their interest and availability to examine the thesis. The Principal Supervisor will complete the Supervisor Agreement with Examiners and return the form to Research Services. Research Services will then send a formal invitation to each examiner.
- 7.7 Communication between examiners is not normally permitted. A request in writing explaining the reason(s) for the interaction must be provided for consideration by the Research Committee. No examiner details will be revealed to other examiners without consent.
- 7.8 An examiner may make a request to question the candidate on any aspect of the work via the Director HDR. A copy of the question(s) and response(s) will be sent to the other examiners.
- 7.9 Examiner reports remain confidential until the Research Committee has made a recommendation to the Academic Board. After the outcome of the thesis examination process is known, candidates may request a copy of the examiners' reports, and the identity of examiners who have consented may be made known to the candidate.
- 7.10 Examiners may be informed of the final outcome of the examination process if requested.
- 7.11 Examination reports are provided by examiners to Avondale University under confidential conditions and should not be shared with persons external to Avondale's HDR process.

Examiner conflict of interest

- 7.12 Conflicts of interest must be declared at all points of the examiner selection process. Where a conflict of interest exists, the most recent version of the *Australian Council of Graduate Research (ACGR) Disclosing and Managing Interests in Graduate Research* will be applied to determine whether the examiner/potential examiner may continue the examination process or is terminated.
- 7.13 Potential examiners who have been employed by Avondale within the last five years, including adjunct/conjoint staff, are excluded.
- 7.14 A dispute regarding the appointment of examiners will be referred to the HDR Committee for recommendation to the Research Committee for approval and action.

8. THESIS EXAMINATION CRITERIA

8.1 Each examiner will submit an independent report using the 'HDR Examiner Report' form that requires feedback on the following criteria the candidate is expected to demonstrate:

8.2 PhD criteria:

- a) Design, plan and execute an original piece of research, based on an expert mastery of appropriate research methodology, research integrity and ethics;
- b) Demonstrate a systematic and critical understanding of a substantial and complex body of knowledge at the frontier of a field of work or learning, in one or more fields of study;
- c) Demonstrate substantial knowledge of research principles and methods relevant to the discipline or area of learning;
- d) Demonstrate expert cognitive, technical and creative skills, based on a mastery of theoretical knowledge using intellectual independence, to reflect critically on, synthesise and evaluate theory and its application to undertake systematic investigation to generate significant and original knowledge;
- e) Disseminate research results to peers and the community; and
- f) As a leading scholar at the frontier of a discipline or disciplines, demonstrate intellectual independence, initiative and adaptability to generate a significant, expert and original contribution to knowledge.

8.3 MPhil criteria:

- a) Design, plan and execute a substantial piece of research, based on a mastery of appropriate research methodology, research integrity and ethics;
- b) Demonstrate an advanced and integrated understanding of a complex and specialised body of knowledge that includes the understanding of recent developments, in one or more disciplines;
- c) Demonstrate advanced knowledge of research principles and methods relevant to the discipline or area of learning;
- d) Demonstrate expert and specialised cognitive, technical and creative skills, based on a mastery of theoretical knowledge, to reflect critically on, synthesise and evaluate theory and its application to different bodies of knowledge;
- e) Disseminate research results to specialised and non-specialised audiences; and
- f) As an expert in a discipline or disciplines, demonstrate intellectual independence, initiative and adaptability to make a contribution to knowledge.

9. EXAMINER REPORTS

9.1 Examiner reports conclude with one of the following recommendations:

- a) Pass – the thesis as submitted is assessed as satisfactory for the award of the degree without substantial changes; it is a sound and original work of scholarship, worthy of publication; the arguments are clearly expressed and the data analysis is appropriate and effective; it is well presented with relevant and detailed annotations; parts of the thesis may already have been published in reputable journals; and a small number of typographical errors may be noted for correction by the candidate.

- b) Minor Revisions – the thesis as submitted is assessed as satisfactory for the award of the degree following specified minor revisions that are carried out to the satisfaction of the Principal Supervisor and the HDR Committee. These revisions may relate to a significant number of typographical errors, minor editorial changes, improvement of expression, and/or better presentation of the data that are not sufficient to justify a major revision, resubmission or fail. In all cases where minor revisions are awarded, the candidate is normally expected to complete these minor revisions within **one month**. If the amended version of the thesis has not been submitted within one month, or extended time approved, it will be considered that the requirements of the degree have not been met and the result will be returned as a fail.
- c) Major Revisions – the thesis as submitted is assessed as satisfactory for the award of the degree following major revisions carried out to the satisfaction of the Principal Supervisor and the HDR Committee. These major revisions may involve major revisions to a part or parts of the thesis and are not sufficient to justify resubmission or fail. These may include revising the literature review, rewriting parts of the thesis and/or reorganising the order of the chapters. In cases where major revisions are awarded, the candidate is normally allowed **two months** to complete them unless otherwise advised by the Chair. If the amended version of the thesis has not been submitted within two months, or extended time approved, it will be considered that the requirements of the degree have not been met and the result will be returned as a fail.
- d) Resubmission – the thesis as submitted is assessed as unsatisfactory for the award of the degree but is not sufficient to justify a fail. Resubmission might be recommended where the thesis has merit and could be brought to the required standard with the additional research and revision as specified in the examiner's report. These may include revisions to the structural aspects of the thesis, or conceptual framework, methodological or analytical flaws in presentation or discussion of the data. The candidate is normally permitted up to **six months** to resubmit the thesis in accordance with the examiners' comments. If the amended version of the thesis has not been submitted within six months or extended approved time, it will be considered that the requirements of the degree have not been met and the result will be returned as a fail.
- e) Fail – the thesis as submitted is assessed as unsatisfactory for the award of the degree and the examiners recommend that the degree not be awarded. Reasons for a fail may include: the thesis lacks coherence and argument; there is a lack of understanding of the theory involved; the research has confused theoretical and methodological perspectives; the work is not original or is of minimal scholarly value.

9.2 If a PhD thesis is failed or requires resubmission, the Research Committee may approve an invitation for the candidate to enrol in a lesser degree and to rewrite the thesis for submission for an award at that level.

Delayed examiner reports

9.3 Research Services will remain in regular contact with examiners to ensure, where possible, reports are returned within eight weeks.

9.4 If an examiner expects significant delay in returning the report or fails to provide a report within 30 calendar days of the expected date of receipt, the Director HDR will confer with the Principal Supervisor and may appoint a replacement examiner.

9.5 In the event a thesis is sent to a replacement examiner, any report subsequently received from the examiner who has been replaced will not be considered in determining the result of the examination.

Response to examiner reports

- 9.6 The HDR Committee will review the examiner reports and may make recommendations to the Principal Supervisor regarding feedback provided by the examiners. Research Services will prepare de-identified examiner reports, the 'Examiner Report Collation' document and any HDR Committee recommendations. These will be emailed to the Principal Supervisor, who will work with the candidate to respond to all examiner feedback on the 'Examiner Report Collation' document and make required changes to the thesis.
- 9.7 Candidates will normally be required to attend to any matters of editorial quality noted by the examiners, even when the consensus recommendation is 'Pass'.
- 9.8 In all cases, the candidate may be required to submit additional material for further examination. Typically the same examiner/s will examine the material.
- 9.9 The Chair of the HDR Committee will report to the Research Committee regarding examiner results and will confirm that the examiner feedback has been addressed satisfactorily. The Research Committee will consider this report to inform their final recommendation to the Academic Board.

Lack of consensus between examiners

- 9.10 Where there is a lack of consensus in the advice provided by the examiners, the HDR Committee and Principal Supervisor will work to resolve the conflict.
- 9.11 Where a lack of consensus exists between examiners regarding the final result, the HDR Committee will consider the matrix below¹.

Case	Examiner recommendations				Result
	Fail	Resubmit	Major Revisions	Pass & Minor Revisions	
1		1	1	1	Major revisions
2	1		1	1	Major revisions
3	1	1		1	Resubmit
4	1	1	1		Resubmit
5			1	2	Minor revisions
6		1		2	Minor revisions
7	1			2	Minor revisions
8			2	1	Major revisions
9		1	2		Major revisions
10	1		2		Major revisions
11		2		1	Resubmit
12		2	1		Resubmit
13	1	2			Resubmit
14	2			1	Arbiter (as per 9.12)
15	2		1		Fail
16	2	1			Fail

¹ Developed by the University of Southern Queensland

Engaging an arbiter

9.12 In problematic cases the HDR Committee may recommend to the Research Committee the appointment of an appropriately qualified external arbiter to review the thesis and examiner reports. For example, an arbiter may be asked to provide a recommendation as to whether the examiner results stand, or the thesis should be resubmitted.

10. RE-SUBMISSION AND RE-EXAMINATION

10.1 Candidates will be required to enrol in the appropriate thesis unit to compensate the ongoing use of Avondale staff resources and facilities.

10.2 The Principal Supervisor will coordinate the resubmission process unless the HDR Committee makes an alternate arrangement.

10.3 The initial examiners will normally be invited to re-examine a resubmitted thesis. If an examiner chooses not to re-examine, a replacement examiner will be appointed.

10.4 The thesis must be re-examined by all examiners in its entirety, not merely in light of the comments provided in the initial examination.

10.5 Examiners of a resubmitted thesis are required to make one of the following recommendations:

- a) Pass with no amendments (the candidate will pass the degree).
- b) Pass with minor revisions (the candidate will pass the degree subject to making required changes to the satisfaction of the HDR Committee).
- c) Fail (the candidate will not be awarded the degree).

10.6 Candidates are allowed only one opportunity to resubmit their thesis.

10.7 For relevant timeframes relating to re-submission and re-examination, please refer to Section 9.

11. AWARD OF THE DEGREE

11.1 The Academic Board will confer the degree of PhD or MPhil to a candidate who has:

- a) completed the prescribed program of study including any special qualifying programs;
- b) submitted a thesis embodying the results of the study or resulting from the study;
- c) satisfied the appointed examiners that the thesis meets the requirements for the award of the degree; and
- d) performed satisfactorily in any additional oral, written or practical examination on the subject of the thesis and matter relevant to it.

12. THESIS DEPOSIT & ACCESS

- 12.1 After conferral, candidates are required to upload an electronic copy of their thesis to Avondale's research repository. Upload instructions will be provided by Research Services.
- 12.2 While a thesis is not normally embargoed, an embargo may be granted for a period of 12 months to allow for publication based on thesis research. Requests to apply an embargo beyond 12 months or restrict access by other means should be made to the Research Committee. Embargoes beyond 12 months will only be granted in exceptional circumstances. Where confidentiality applies to portions of a thesis, these portions should form a separate confidential appendix.
- 12.3 Candidates must list all third-party copyright materials in the front pages of the thesis to enable appropriate acknowledgement. Permissions must be obtained from the candidate and all third-party copyright holders to allow for the reproduction of their work in print and digital form. Acknowledgement of funding sources should also be provided in the thesis document.
- 12.4 Candidates will not be eligible to graduate or receive copies of their academic record and testamur until their thesis has been uploaded in accordance with this Procedure.
- 12.5 A printed copy of the thesis is not required.

13. APPEALS PROCEDURE

- 13.1 A candidate who has reasonable grounds for appeal of any formal decision made with respect to their candidature and/or the examination and assessment of the thesis, may refer to the *Appeal Policy* and lodge an appeal.

Table of amendments

Version Number	5.0	Replaces Version	4.0
Date Published	15 March 2024	Scheduled Review Date	March 2029
Approving Body	Academic Board	Approval Date	6 March 2024
Policy Owner	Director Higher Degree Research	Date first introduced	August 2008
Short description of amendment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Updates to clarify procedure• Updated Thesis Examination Criteria• Incorporated previous <i>Thesis Deposit & Access Policy</i>		