

Doctoral Examinations Protocol

Summary

When arranging the examination and appointing examiners for doctoral examinations there are regulations and processes that need to be followed in order to facilitate a smooth and successful examination. This protocol outlines the timeframe, submission process, and examination process for doctoral examinations.

Purpose

This protocol outlines the requirements and process for the examination of doctoral students, including Doctor of Philosophy (360 points thesis) and professional doctorates (240-point thesis).

Scope

This protocol is to be used when arranging the examination for doctoral students and does not include:

- Creative/Format 3 examinations
- Master's Research Examinations
- Bachelor with Honours Examinations

Application

Submission

Three months prior to examination the supervisors should arrange the appointment of examiners. Refer to the *Appointment of Examiners Protocol* for further details on appointing doctoral examiners.

Declaration of Suitability for Examination

The primary supervisor/co-supervisor (admin lead) and Associate Dean (Postgraduate), or delegated authority are required to declare that the thesis is of a suitable standard for examination. This relates to the presentation of the thesis, including correct formats, legibility, accuracy, clarity of expression and general freedom from typographical and grammatical errors, but is not an indication of the quality of the work. The University will normally not proceed with the examination of a thesis considered not to be in a suitable form for examination.

Submission Against Supervisor Advice

It is important to note that a student has the right to request that the thesis be examined, even though the supervisors may not believe it to be of a suitable standard. Such instances must be clearly identified on the 'Lodgement for Examination' form, which must have statements from the supervisors and the student outlining the circumstances attached to it. Where the Faculty Associate Dean (Postgraduate) or delegated authority is not prepared to sign off for examination, this should also be noted on the Lodgement for Examination form along with an explanation of the reason. In such circumstances, the GRS will consult with the Dean of the Graduate Research School on appropriate action.

Attestation of Authorship

Students should attest and sign a declaration, certifying the original contribution of the thesis. The attestation of authorship should state:

"I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor used artificial intelligence tools or generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated, and referenced, along with the purpose of use), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning."

For format two theses, the student should be the principal author, with a stated contribution which constitutes the leadership and writing up of the work reported in the manuscript(s). Research components including manuscripts must include a signed declaration which specifies the extent and nature of the contribution and co-authors' contribution to each of the manuscripts. A *Co-Authorship Contribution Template* can be used and inserted into the thesis for examination.

Lodgement of Thesis/Exegesis for Examination

A student must lodge one digital copy of the doctoral thesis for examination with the faculty postgraduate office, accompanied by a completed electronic copy of the 'Lodgement of Thesis for Examination' form. Lodgement of the thesis and form need to be approved by the Associate Dean (Postgraduate), or delegated authority. All copies are then forwarded to the GRS for examination.

Confidential Material and Embargo Process

Students may apply to have an embargo for their thesis prior to or at the time of lodgement for examination by submitting an 'Application for Embargo' form. For further details on embargos refer to the Postgraduate Handbook.

Examination process

Examination Timeframe

Examiners are asked to provide their written reports within eight weeks. All examiners reports will normally be released to the student at an oral examination briefing, 7- 10 days prior to the oral examination. Normally, the oral examination will be scheduled upon receipt of all examiner reports. Throughout the examination process the GRS maintains contact with the examiners to monitor progress. Students may contact the GRS to enquire about the progress of the doctoral examination. The entire examination process and determination of a final grade may take approximately four months but may extend past this period. Refer to the Postgraduate Handbook for more information on exam timeframes.

Convenor

A Convenor will be appointed by the GRS and will accept overall responsibility for ensuring that the examination is fair to the students whilst meeting the expectations of the University Postgraduate Research Board (UPRB), the University and the examiners. The Convenor must be neutral (no expertise in the subject matter) and will normally be located in a different faculty from the student.

Doctoral Examiners Reports

Each examiner is asked to provide a written report to the GRS commenting on:

- The overall performance of the student in relation to peers on comparable programmes;
- The appropriateness of research methodology used;
- The student's original contribution to knowledge and practice in their chosen discipline or field of study/practice;
- The depth and breadth of coverage of the subject matter concerned;
- The presentation of the thesis/exegesis;
- The quality of the knowledge and skills (both general and subject-specific) demonstrated by the student.

When all reports have been received, copies will be distributed to all members of the examination panel. There will be no discussion between the examiners, supervisors and student prior to the oral examination. The Convenor may contact examiners for clarification on any issues in the reports.

If there is no clear agreement on the outcome once the written reports have been completed, a third examiner may be appointed and the thesis sent for further examination. Where this occurs, the examiners reports will be made available to the primary supervisor/co-supervisor (admin lead) and Associate Dean (Postgraduate) to ensure that a suitable examiner is appointed in relation to the concerns raised.

Oral Examination Process

Student Oral Examination Briefings

The Convenor is responsible for overseeing the arrangements for an oral examination in conjunction with the GRS. In order to ensure the student is familiar with the format of the examination, an oral examination briefing will be held with the Convenor, primary supervisor/co-supervisor (admin lead) and student, prior to the oral examination. At this meeting the Convenor will explain the oral examination process to the student and disclose the identity of the examiner. Students will be provided with a copy of the anonymised examiners reports at the end of the briefing.

If the student has any special circumstances that the examiners should be aware of, these should be identified at the oral examination briefing and the supervisor(s) may submit information to the GRS examinations team detailing the special circumstances. Such circumstances may include but are not limited to specific learning difficulties (refer to specific learning difficulties protocol), cultural considerations etc.

Oral Examination

Normally, the oral examination will take place within two months of receipt of all the examiners' reports and students are not permitted to defer their oral examination, unless under exceptional circumstances. Students may opt for an in-person or online oral examination. In some instances, such as unexpected pandemics or severe events, orals may be conducted using Zoom at short notice. Refer to the *Off-Campus Oral Examination Protocol* if an online oral examination is selected. The oral examination panel normally consists of a Convenor and all examiners.

The oral examination criterion is:

- To independently discuss their thesis with criticality at a doctoral level.

The Convenor will chair the oral examination, ensuring that the questions raised in the examiners' reports are put to the student during the examination. The Convenor will determine with the examiners the order of the questions, and who will ask them, prior to the oral examination commencing, along with who will present any absent examiner's questions. The Convenor will not interfere with the questioning and will not comment on the student's thesis.

At the conclusion of the oral examination, the Panel will attempt to reach a consensus on the recommendations:

- 1) If the Panel reaches agreement, the Convenor will complete the Convenor Report and Final Recommendation form and write a brief report on the oral examination and submit this report along with any required or recommended amendments, to the GRS for the next meeting of the UPRB.
- 2) If the Examination Panel is unable to reach agreement on the outcome of the examination process, the Convenor will seek approval from the UPRB to proceed with an alternative action (including further assessment of the thesis) in order to resolve any impasse.

Recommendations on the outcome and/or amendments to the thesis, either by the examiners or the Examination Panel, will normally be advised to the student and supervisor(s) at the conclusion of the oral examination, and communicated in writing from the Examinations Officer within one week of the examination.

Examination Outcomes

Until a determination has been made on the final recommendation, the recommendations must remain confidential to the GRS and UPRB.

The possible outcomes are:

1) That the student be awarded a doctoral degree;

This does allow the student to address any typographical errors and minor editorial matters.

2) That the student be awarded a doctoral degree subject to the student making minor amendments only (as identified by the examiners) to the satisfaction of the primary supervisor/co-supervisor (admin lead) or nominee;

These include more than superficial editorial amendments. Normally, amendments take up to one month full-time equivalent

3) That the student be awarded the doctoral degree subject to the student making amendments (as identified by the examiners) to the satisfaction of the primary supervisor/co-supervisor (admin lead) and/or examiner(s) as appropriate;

These include more than minor amendments and can include rewriting a chapter, reorganising material in the thesis, improving or clarifying an argument, omitting or deleting sections of the thesis. This outcome may be split into three different options:

- a. Amendments are completed to the satisfaction of the supervisor(s)/Co-Supervisor (admin lead)
- b. Amendments are completed to the satisfaction of the examiner(s)
- c. Where the amendments are to be completed to the satisfaction of the examiner(s) the examiners may request a second oral examination following the revisions.

Normally, amendments take up to three months full-time equivalent.

4) That the student be required to revise and resubmit for further examination within a specified time;

This outcome means the student does not meet the criteria for examination:

- There is limited or no internal consistency;
- More data is required;
- There are methodological issues;
- Multiple chapter changes;
- One or more of the above may include an in-depth re-writing of the literature review.

Refer to the *Revise and Resubmit Protocol* for further details on the resubmission process.

5) That the thesis is not of an acceptable standard and the degree not be awarded;

Should all examiners recommend that the thesis be failed, the student may choose to proceed with an oral examination in order to give the student the opportunity to defend their thesis. If the student elects not to have an oral examination the examination process will be deemed complete.

The thesis cannot be resubmitted for the same degree. With the permission of the UPRB, a revised thesis may be submitted for a lesser degree. Where it is recommended that the degree not be awarded, and no re-examination is permitted, the examiners shall prepare an agreed statement of deficiencies of the thesis, and the reason for their decision, which can be forwarded to the student through the UPRB.

Where recommendations and reports are unanimous, the UPRB accepts recommendations; where these are not unanimous the Board:

- accepts a majority recommendation (where the majority includes external examiner recommendations); or
- accepts the recommendations of external examiners

Amendment Submission

The student will be advised what amendments are necessary, verbally and in writing. Where clarifications are needed on the required amendments, the student or supervisor may contact the GRS for further discussion. When these required amendments have been completed to the satisfaction of the nominee(s) specified in the Convenor's summary, that person will forward the Amendments to Thesis form to the GRS confirming that all the corrections have been completed satisfactorily. The GRS will then notify the UPRB and Academic Board and the degree will be awarded.

For outcome 3 above, amendments can be submitted for sign-off no more than twice. Where amendments have failed to be successfully completed after the second submission, or the oral examination criterion is not met following the oral examination re-sit, the outcome recommendation will be rescinded and the thesis will be deemed as not of an acceptable standard and the degree not awarded.

Outcome

The examination of doctoral theses be thoroughly planned and executed in a timely and effective manner.

Review

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April 2017

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Related Protocols and Forms

Appointment of Examiners Protocol

Off-Campus Oral Examination Protocol

Revise and Resubmit Protocol

Co-Authorship Contribution Template