

Draft institutional guidelines informed by CDU Higher Degree by Research policy discussions and consultation with relevant stakeholders, contributions from current and former CDU staff, and broader sector approaches to practice-led, practice-based, and artefact–exegesis research, including consideration of relevant guidance, policies, and frameworks from other Australian institutions and HDR/HE sector bodies such as the Australian Council of Graduate Research (ACGR)

1. Purpose

These guidelines outline the principles, expectations, and requirements for Higher Degree by Research (HDR) candidates undertaking a PhD or Master by Research through a Creative Artefact/Research Object–Exegesis pathway at Charles Darwin University (CDU).

The guidelines support a broad and transdisciplinary interpretation of creative artefacts and research objects across the arts, humanities, social sciences, sciences, health, public policy, engineering, technology, education, First Nations research, and professional practice contexts.

This pathway enables candidates to demonstrate a substantial original contribution to knowledge through an integrated combination of:

- a creative artefact and/or research object; and
- an accompanying exegesis that critically contextualises, analyses, and articulates the contribution to knowledge of the overall research project and discipline.

This form of research is also commonly described internationally as practice-led, practice-based, or “PhD by practice” research. In such approaches, creative or professional practice may function not only as an outcome of research, but also as a method of inquiry and knowledge generation.

2. Nature of the Thesis

A Creative Artefact/Research Object–Exegesis thesis combines scholarly inquiry with creative, professional, technical, or applied research outputs.

The creative artefact or research object may include traditional or non-traditional research outputs depending on disciplinary norms and the nature of the research question.

Examples may include, but are not limited to:

Creative artefacts:

- visual art exhibitions;
- performances;
- creative writing;
- films and media productions;
- other creative or practice-based works.

Research objects:

- software systems;
- datasets;
- engineering prototypes;
- digital platforms;
- policy or professional outputs;
- archives or collections;
- design projects;
- community-based projects;
- publications or portfolios of publications;
- Indigenous knowledge projects; or
- other discipline-specific artefacts, outputs, or research objects.

The artefact/research object and the exegesis are examined as complementary components of a single doctoral research project. Neither component is considered secondary or supplementary to the other.

3. Practice-Led and Practice-Based Research

In practice-led and practice-based research, creative practice, professional practice, or applied inquiry may function as a mode of generating knowledge.

Research questions, conceptual understandings, and methodological insights may evolve iteratively through the research and creative process itself.

The relationship between the creative artefact/research object and the exegesis should itself form an important aspect of the original contribution to knowledge.

The exegesis is not merely a descriptive commentary or reflective journal. It should critically situate the research within relevant scholarly, disciplinary, theoretical, cultural, methodological, and/or professional contexts. It should argue the social, cultural, economic, environmental, political or educational impacts the artefact or object contributes to.

4. Individual and Collaborative Creative Artefacts/Research Objects

Creative artefacts and research objects submitted for examination would normally represent the candidate's individual research and creative effort. However, collaborative, co-created, co-produced, or co-authored outputs may be included provided these form part of a coherent and integrated doctoral research project and where the candidate's individual contribution can be clearly identified and evaluated.

Where collaborative artefacts/objects/outputs are included:

- the candidate must clearly identify and document their individual contribution to each;
- contributions may include conceptualisation, methodology, analysis, writing, creative practice, technical development, design, production, curation, or other scholarly or professional contributions;

- the thesis must demonstrate that the candidate has made a substantial and original individual contribution to the overall research project;
- all collaborative and co-authored work must comply with CDU research integrity, authorship, copyright, and intellectual property requirements;
- co-created or co-authored outputs included within the thesis must not have been previously submitted, in whole or substantial part, toward another PhD, Masters by Research, or equivalent research qualification by another candidate.

Where appropriate, the candidate must provide contribution statements acknowledged by supervisors, collaborators, co-creators, or co-authors. Use of Generative AI should also be acknowledged.

All creative artefacts/research objects included within the thesis should be critically contextualised through the exegesis and integrated into the overall research narrative and contribution to knowledge.

5. Structure and Length

The final structure of the thesis may vary according to disciplinary conventions, the nature of the artefact/research object, and supervisory and examination requirements.

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As a general guide:

- the exegesis for a Masters by Research thesis would normally fall within the range of approximately 10,000–25,000 words;
- the exegesis for a doctoral thesis would normally fall within the range of approximately 30,000–50,000 words;
- shorter or longer exegetical components may be appropriate where justified by the scale, scope, complexity, or disciplinary nature of the creative artefact/research object.

The combined creative artefact/research object and exegesis should demonstrate the equivalent intellectual and research effort expected of the relevant HDR award level.

The exegesis would normally include:

- introduction and research context;
- literature and contextual review;
- research aims and/or questions;
- methodology and methods;
- critical analysis and discussion;
- articulation of the contribution to knowledge
- real world impacts
- and conclusion.

Alternative structures may be appropriate where justified by disciplinary practice, including integrated or non-traditional formats where these support the research aims and contribution to knowledge.

6. Ethics and Research Integrity

All Creative Artefact/Research Object–Exegesis projects must comply with CDU ethics and research integrity requirements.

Candidates must:

- complete relevant research integrity and ethics training;
- obtain ethics approval prior to commencing any required data collection or participant involvement;
- comply with copyright, cultural, confidentiality, and intellectual property requirements; and
- ensure appropriate permissions for the use of identifiable, confidential, collaborative, or culturally sensitive material.

Projects involving autobiographical work, institutional critique, community participation, or Indigenous knowledge may require additional ethical consideration and consultation.

7. Supervision

Supervisory panels should collectively provide expertise relevant to:

- the discipline area;
- the research methodology;
- and the form of creative artefact or research object.

Candidates are expected to consult supervisors regarding:

- substantial changes in project direction;
- major methodological changes;
- changes to artefact/research object scope;
- publication plans;
- ethics implications; and
- collaborative arrangements.

8. Examination

Creative Artefact/Research Object–Exegesis theses are examined according to the same doctoral standards applied to all HDR degrees.

Examiners assess:

- originality and significance of the contribution to knowledge;
- intellectual and methodological rigour;
- coherence between the artefact/research object and exegesis;
- disciplinary and scholarly contribution;
- critical and reflective capacity; and
- the quality and significance of the overall integrated research project.

Where appropriate, examinations may involve exhibitions, performances, demonstrations, screenings, presentations, or access to digital or online materials. Candidates must ensure examiners are able to access and evaluate all examinable components appropriately.

9. Candidate Capability and Admission

Applicants should demonstrate capacity appropriate to doctoral-level research and/or professional or creative practice.

Evidence may include:

- prior academic study in the relevant discipline of the artefact/ object;
- creative works, exhibitions or performances;
- industry or community engagement;
- technical expertise;
- professional practice;
- publications or research outputs;
- or other evidence of scholarly and creative capability.

Applicants should demonstrate why the proposed research requires a Creative Artefact/Research Object–Exegesis approach and how the project will contribute original knowledge to the field. A draft budget may be required to demonstrate how the artefact/object fits within the scope of the allocated budget and be feasible based on CDU resources and equipment.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) may be considered in accordance with CDU policy and HDR requirements. In some circumstances, candidates may seek recognition for prior doctoral-level research, creative artefacts, research objects, publications, or related outputs previously developed:

- as part of candidature at another institution;
- through prior CDU research projects or initiatives;
- or through other approved doctoral-level research contexts.

Applications for RPL would normally require evidence demonstrating:

- the originality and doctoral-level standard of the work;
- the candidate's individual contribution;
- compliance with research integrity, ethics, authorship, copyright, and intellectual property requirements;

- and that the work has not previously been awarded as part of another completed PhD, Masters by Research, or equivalent qualification.

Where prior work has been developed through CDU research projects, initiatives, or approved research activities, this may assist in demonstrating appropriate research governance, ethics, and integrity processes. Any approved RPL must remain consistent with AQF requirements and CDU expectations regarding original contribution to knowledge and independent research capability.

10. Final Principle

The defining criterion of a PhD by Creative Artefact/Research Object–Exegesis is not the form of the artefact itself, but the extent to which the integrated thesis demonstrates a rigorous, original, and significant contribution to knowledge appropriate to doctoral-level research.

References and Acknowledgement

These draft guidelines were informed by:

- CDU HDR policy discussions and prior CDU guideline development;
- Contributions from current and former CDU staff;
- Australian and international institutional approaches to practice-led and artefact–exegesis doctoral research;
- Sector guidance relating to doctoral examination, publications, and practice-based research.

Relevant reference materials consulted include:

- UK Council for Graduate Education guidance on publications and artefacts in doctoral submissions;
- UniSA guidelines for theses containing published research and theses by creative practice;
- La Trobe University guidelines for practice-based research degrees;
- Selected Australian and international literature relating to practice-led, practice-based, and publication-integrated doctoral research.