Higher Degree by Research (HDR)
Examination Procedures

INTRODUCTION

There are a number of steps and requirements undertaken during the HDR examination procedures which need to comply with University policy and Common Course Rules. There are 7 stages in the HDR examination procedures:

Stage 1: Selection and Approval of Examiners
Stage 2: Submission of the Thesis including Principal Supervisor Certification
Stage 3: Examination of the Thesis
Stage 4: Evaluation of the Examiner Reports
Stage 5: Submission of the Amended Thesis
Stage 6: Re-examination (where required)
Stage 7: Completion and Lodgement

The Office of Research and Innovation (ORI) will coordinate the HDR examination process.

COMPLIANCE

This is a compliance requirement under the:

- Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards); and
- National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students

INTENT

This document is intended to provide procedural details to support the Common Course Rules for the courses leading to the degrees of Doctor of Philosophy, Master by Research, Masters of Visual Arts and Research Professional Doctorate, in particular the HDR examination procedures. This document is also intended to provide supervisors, students and administrative staff with the necessary information and understanding to successfully navigate the examination process, whilst ensuring compliance with University requirements.

RELEVANT DEFINITIONS

In the context of this document

**Associate Supervisor** means an individual who has demonstrated expertise in the Candidate's research area and who provides advice in specialised aspects of the research program. This person may not necessarily be a University staff member.

**DVC** means Deputy Vice-Chancellor. The DVC in many instances acts as the delegate of the Research and Research Training Committee.
**Early Career Researcher** means a person who has completed their PhD (or an equivalent postgraduate degree with a significant component of research training) in the past five years. When appropriate, career interruptions may be taken into account by adding the duration of the interruption to the five year period.

**Examiner** means a person who is approved by the Research Committee to examine the candidate’s thesis. Such persons would normally be external to the University. An examiner who lives in a country other than Australia is considered to be an international examiner.

**Faculty HDR Panel** means an ad hoc panel convened by the Faculty Pro Vice-Chancellor for the purposes of confirmation of candidature, recommendation of scholarships and evaluation of examiners reports for Higher Degrees by Research. The Panel has a minimum of three academic members of staff and is composed on a case by case basis, taking into consideration the reason for convening the panel, the criteria for membership and any real or perceived conflicts of interest.

**HDR** means Higher Degree by Research and includes PhD Candidates, Masters by Research Candidates and Research Professional Doctorate Candidates.

**ORI** means the Charles Darwin University Office of Research and Innovation.

**Principal Supervisor** means an academic staff member of the University who holds a degree and/or experience deemed by the DVC as equivalent to the degree being undertaken by the Candidate and who is primarily responsible for the rigorous supervision of the program of study of the Candidate.

**PVC Delegate** means the Faculty Associate Dean or equivalent.

**RRTC** means the University’s Research and Research Training Committee, or the RRTC Chair as per delegation lines.

**Reserve Examiner** means a person who is approved to examine a candidate’s thesis in the event that: one of the nominated examiners becomes unavailable; an additional assessment is required; or adjudication over original assessments is required.

**Supervisory Panel** means a group of individuals approved by the Research Committee to provide academic and administrative support to the candidate that ensures timely submission of a high quality Thesis. The Supervisory Panel must consist of at least a Principal Supervisor and two Associate Supervisors.

**The Committee** means the University’s Research and Research Training Committee.

**PROCEDURES**

**Stage 1: Selection and Approval of Examiners**

The candidate and Supervisory Panel should begin to think about the choice of examiners about 8 months before the submission of the thesis. The **Recommendation of Examiners Form (HDR-25)** needs to be completed and submitted to the Office of Research and Innovation through the Faculty Pro Vice-Chancellor (or PVC Delegate) at least two months prior to the intended thesis submission date.

**Number of Examiners required**

For the examination of a PhD thesis, three examiners are required. For the examination of a Master’s thesis, two examiners are required. In addition, the name and details of at least one reserve examiner must be provided for both PhD and Master’s theses examinations.
Reserve Examiner

The Reserve Examiner may serve one of three purposes in the HDR examination process:

- A nominated examiner is unable to discharge their duties and examine the thesis. In this case the reserve examiner will act as a replacement for that examiner;
- One of the examiners recommends an overall grade of Fail. In this case, University procedure is that the thesis be sent to the reserve examiner; or
- The reserve examiner acts as an adjudicator between discrepant reports involving the other examiners.

Whilst there is a tendency to regard the reserve examiner as the least important examiner, in the last 2 situations above, it is clearly desirable that the reserve examiner has sufficient experience and judgement to give a considered recommendation of whether a candidate should fail or pass.

Selection of Examiners

It is the responsibility of the Principal Supervisor to submit the Recommendation of Examiners form to the RRTC through the Faculty Pro Vice-Chancellor/Director (or delegate). The candidate will be informed of the list of examiners.

The candidate is permitted to have input into this process and may provide a list of people to be excluded from consideration as potential examiners to the Supervisory Panel. Should the candidate provide such a list, they must also provide reason/s as to why such person/s would be unsuitable.

The final list of examiners submitted to the RRTC is the sole responsibility of the Supervisory Panel.

The following considerations shall guide the choice of examiners:

- An examiner shall normally hold a degree that is at least the equivalent of that of the candidate for which he or she is appointed to examine;
- An examiner shall have a proven track record of research and/or scholarship in a field of study relevant to the subject matter on which the thesis to be examined is based;
- An examiner shall be active in research and/or scholarship at the time of acting as an examiner;
- It is desirable that an examiner shall be experienced in supervising and/or examining HDR candidates;
- The use of internal examiners is not permitted and therefore an examiner must not be an employee of the University at the time of appointment as an examiner;
- The use of international examiners is strongly encouraged. The exclusion of international examiners from selection must be justified to the RRTC;
- An examiner shall not have interests in common with the candidate, the principal supervisor or the thesis project, which could result in a conflict of interests or bias during the examination process. In identifying and selecting potential examiners, the supervisory panel should refer to section – Examination Conflicts of Interest - of this document below;
- The candidate may indicate in writing to the Pro Vice-Chancellor or delegate, giving reasons why, any person/s in the opinion of the candidate, would be inappropriate as examiners; and
- The view of a candidate about an examiner shall be openly considered by the Faculty HDR Panel and referred to the DVC for a decision if agreement is not reached.

The completed Recommendation of Examiners Form (HDR-25) with Principal Supervisor’s signature must be submitted directly to the PVC Delegate by the Principal Supervisor or a member of the Supervisory Panel.
The PVC Delegate may request that the Principal Supervisor provide more information on examiner suitability, or decide to withhold endorsement of the Recommendation of Examiners form and request the Supervisor provides an alternate list of examiners.

The PVC Delegate will submit the Recommendation of Examiners Form to the Office of Research and Innovation for consideration by the Research and Research Training Committee.

**Approval of Examiners**

The final authority for the appointment of examiners rests with the Research and Research Training Committee, which will take into consideration advice from the Supervisory Panel, the candidate and the relevant Faculty Pro Vice-Chancellor.

In accordance with the relevant Common Course Rules for the candidate’s HDR, the RRTC shall appoint three examiners in the case of a PhD or Research Professional Doctorate examination, two examiners for Masters by Research examination and at least one reserve examiner for all Higher Degree examinations.

The RRTC may appoint, as it sees fit, any additional examiners.

The RRTC may request that the Supervisory Panel provides alternate examiners where the Committee feels that these Procedures, including Conflicts of Interest, have not been met.

The decision of the RRTC will be conveyed to the Principal Supervisor and PVC Delegate by the Office of Research and Innovation.

**Stage 2: Submission of Thesis including Principal Supervisor Certification**

The candidate submits to the ORI, four (4) examinable copies of their thesis for a PhD or Professional Doctorate, or three (3) copies for a Masters by Research, prepared and bound in the manner outlined in the [HDR – Presentation of Thesis Procedures](#) and approved by the Research and Research Training Committee.

A thesis presented for examination must also be accompanied by the Supervisor’s Certification for Submission of an HDR Thesis for Examination Form which indicates that:

- The candidate has completed the approved program of study;
- The title is consistent with that approved by the Research and Research Training Committee;
- The thesis conforms with the requirements of the Common Course Rules for the degree in which they are enrolled, and to the [HDR - Presentation of Thesis Procedures](#);
- Any inconsistencies in presentation have been pointed out to the candidate;
- The Associate Supervisors have had opportunity to comment on the final draft of the thesis.

If a thesis is not accompanied by the signed approval of the Principal Supervisor, the thesis may not be sent out for examination without the prior approval of the DVC. In such cases, the candidate must provide a cover letter addressed to the DVC outlining the reason/s why they wish to proceed to examination without the approval of the Principal Supervisor.

Where, in the opinion of the Office of Research and Innovation, a thesis fails to comply with the [HDR – Presentation of Thesis Procedures](#), it shall be returned within five (5) working days and without any examination, to the PVC Delegate in the relevant Faculty.
If the Pro Vice-Chancellor or PVC Delegate disagrees with the ORI ruling, they may choose to approach the DVC, submitting the thesis with a cover letter outlining the reasons why they disagree, to obtain a determination as to whether or not to proceed with the examination.

Once the thesis has been deemed to comply, the Office of Research and Innovation will contact the approved examiners to confirm their availability for the examination and current postal addresses.

The copies of a thesis submitted by a candidate shall become the property of the University. The copies shall be subject to any agreement/s entered into by the University, the candidate and/or any sponsoring body of the research.

Where a thesis contains matters affecting social, national or industrial security, commercially or culturally sensitive information, the Research and Research Training Committee may, upon recommendation from the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor/Director or delegate, declare the thesis to be confidential for a specified period of time. In such cases the examiners will be required to sign confidentiality agreements prior to being sent the thesis.

On the date that the thesis is sent to the first examiner by the ORI, the enrolment of the candidate becomes inactive, but the status of 'Student' at the University is maintained.

The Office of Research and Innovation shall notify the candidate, the Principal Supervisor and the PVC Delegate that the thesis is now under examination and the candidate’s enrolment status is inactive.

**Stage 3: Examination of the Thesis**

As each examiner confirms their availability, the Office of Research and Innovation sends a copy of the thesis to the examiner, along with:

- The candidate’s details (including full title of the thesis, the faculty in which the candidate was enrolled, the degree for which the thesis is submitted, the date of submission and details of the candidate’s first language);
- An Examiner’s Report form;
- The Common Course Rules for the degree being examined;
- This HDR Examination Procedure document;
- A copy of the *HDR – Presentation of Thesis Procedures*; and
- A timeframe for the submission of their report.

Examiners shall be informed that, whilst candidates are not normally informed as to the identity of their examiners, the University cannot guarantee confidentiality due to Freedom of Information legislation.

The examiners assess the contribution, quality, scholastic content, presentation and, in the case of PhD, originality of the thesis. The examiners need to be mindful of any requirement or agreement that exists in regard to confidentiality of the work under examination. The examiners shall not consult with each other or seek further information from the candidate except through the Research and Research Training Committee. A copy of any information sought by and provided to any one examiner, must be provided to all other the examiners of the same thesis.

Each examiner completes the Examiner’s Report Form and attaches a written report on their findings, setting out the examiner’s opinions on the quality of the work in relation to the award of the degree.

The Examiners’ Reports are to be returned to the Office of Research and Innovation within eight (8) weeks of the thesis being forwarded to the examiner.
If an examiner does not provide their report to the Office of Research and Innovation within eight (8) weeks of the thesis being forwarded to the examiner, the Office of Research and Innovation will contact the examiner to provide them with a reminder of this requirement.

Where the examiner still has not provided their Examination Report within twelve (12) weeks of the thesis being forwarded to the examiner, the Office of Research and Innovation will seek advice from the Principal Supervisor and PVC Delegate as to whether the thesis should be forwarded to the Reserve Examiner instead.

The Office of Research and Innovation pays honorariums to examiners once their examination report, copy of the thesis and the necessary payment details have been received.

**Stage 4: Evaluation of Examiners’ Reports**

**Faculty Recommendation**

Once all Examiners’ Reports have been received, the Office of Research and Innovation will forward copies of the Examiners’ Reports to the PVC Delegate in the relevant Faculty. If this person is involved in the supervision of the candidate, the reports will instead be forwarded directly to the Chair of the Faculty HDR Panel to avoid any actual or potential conflicts of interest. A memorandum shall accompany the Reports informing the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor that a copy of the faculty recommendations will be sent to each examiner.

The PVC Delegate will liaise with the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor to convene an appropriate Faculty HDR Panel to recommend an outcome and actions required, taking into account Guidelines for the Evaluation of Examiner’s Reports as outlined below.

**Composition of Faculty HDR Panels**

The composition of Faculty HDR Panels, for the purposes of evaluating Examiners’ Reports, shall be as follows:

- A minimum of 3 members of academic staff with qualifications at or above the level of the degree under examination;
- A senior research leader (Academic Level C and above) with a strong track record of HDR completions and examinations (Chair); and
- One research active staff (Academic Level B and above) from the same or related discipline area as the thesis under examination.

**Considerations for Composition of Faculty HDR Panels**

- The experience of all members should include, the examination of theses at the same level of award as the thesis under examination, and the supervision of HDR candidates to completion;
- An early career researcher may participate in the evaluation process, but not have voting rights. Such participation develops the early career researcher’s capacity to supervise HDR Candidates;
- No supervisor of a candidate whose thesis is under examination shall participate in the evaluation of Examiners Reports; however the Principal Supervisor may be called upon to provide advice to the HDR Panel;
- In cases where the Candidate is an employee of the University, the HDR Panel shall not include members from the same work unit (eg. School);
• Where it is not possible to meet the above guidelines the Chair must seek approval of the proposed panel composition from the DVC;
• Where it is deemed necessary the DVC may decide to participate in the evaluation of Examiners Reports or may nominate the Chair of the University Academic Board to participate;
• In cases where the Faculty HDR Panel is unable to reach a consensus on the outcome of a thesis examination, the Chair’s recommendation shall be forwarded to the DVC for decision along with a statement that consensus was not reached, and will include relevant details.

Faculty HDR Panels’ Consideration of Examiners’ Reports

The Faculty HDR Panel meeting will consider the Examiners’ Reports bearing in mind:

• Where one of three examiners (PhD) or one of two examiners (Masters) recommends failure, an additional examiner’s recommendation shall be sought through the Office of Research and Innovation. The DVC can determine that the additional examiner would serve as an adjudicator and in this case the additional examiner would be given the reports of the other examiners; and
• Where two or more examiners recommend failure, the award of the degree shall not be recommended. In this event the candidate may appeal in writing to the DVC only on grounds pertaining to procedural irregularities.

Faculty HDR Panel Chair Recommendations

The Chair of the Faculty HDR Panel shall forward a signed recommendation regarding the examination outcome, along with supporting information including the Examiners’ Reports, to the DVC via the Office of Research and Innovation for approval. The recommendation shall include the following advice and information:

• **Whether the Reports are accepted.** The Faculty HDR panel may evaluate the reports in conjunction with the thesis to determine whether to accept the Examiners’ Reports. If there are doubts about the nature of the Examiners’ Reports, for example the scope, objectivity, expertise, or conflicts of interest, such doubts must be clearly stated so that the DVC may take appropriate action;

• **Whether the degree should be awarded.** This recommendation will be based on the appropriateness of the Examiners' Reports. The Faculty HDR Panel may decide to over-ride an examiner’s summary recommendation, for example, where an examiner has recommended re-examination, the Faculty HDR Panel may instead approve corrections or amendments to be made to the satisfaction of the University only. In this case, reasons must be provided for over-riding the examiner’s recommendations;

• **The nature of any corrections** (based on the Examiners’ Report Forms and/or instruction letters). These may be framed quite generally by recommending that the candidate should address all points raised by the examiner in the section of their report beginning “Changes/Corrections required”; or more specific by stating the exact nature of the amendments required:
  - Example: Page one, paragraph two, replace XXX with XXX
  - Example: Modify chapter 3 addressing all points raised by the examiner with the exception of point Y on page YY
  - Example: Page 37 insert a discussion of 'Joe Bloggs' theory on social structure in ancient Egypt
  - Example: Re-analyse data presented in Chapter 3 and test for significance of variable X.

If the Faculty HDR Panel has asked for the examination copies of the thesis, the copies must also be returned to the ORI.
The Faculty HDR Panel must maintain complete confidentiality during the process of making a Faculty recommendation. The student may not be advised of any aspect of the process and student enquiries should be referred to the ORI.

**Deputy Vice-Chancellor Decision and Advice to Candidate**

The ORI will forward the Faculty HDR Panel’s recommendation, along with the Examiner’s Reports and other relevant information, to the DVC for consideration.

The DVC receives the recommendations of the Faculty HDR Panel and the Examiners’ Reports, and determines whether, subject to the completion of any alteration/s or condition/s recommended by the Examiners, the candidate has fulfilled all the requirements for the degree.

The DVC may, in making a determination, consult with the examiners, obtain further information from the candidate or the examiners, or appoint additional examiners for the thesis, as the DVC sees fit.

The DVC may direct the candidate to:

- **Proceed with completion of the thesis**, in which case no amendments are required and the candidate moves to the Completion and Lodgement of Thesis stage below.

- **Undertake minor corrections/amendments to the thesis**, in which case the candidate moves to the Stage 5: Submission of Amended Thesis stage below. The candidate:
  - Shall not be required to resubmit the thesis for re-examination;
  - Shall complete all corrections/amendments to the satisfaction of the Faculty HDR Panel/University and shall lodge the relevant number of copies of their thesis with the ORI within three (3) months of being notified of the outcome of the examination; and
  - Shall not be required to re-enrol prior to lodging the thesis unless the candidate fails to comply with the preceding point, in which case the candidate shall be required to re-enrol prior to thesis lodgement.

- **Undertake major amendments to the thesis and undergo re-examination**, in which case the candidate moves through Stages 5 and 6: Submission of Amended Thesis and Re-examination below. The candidate shall be required to re-enrol in order to address the issues raised by the examiners and then to submit the revised thesis for re-examination.

The decision of the DVC is final and binding. The DVC is unlikely to override Faculty HDR Panel recommendations unless the circumstances require special consideration.

The ORI will advise the PVC Delegate, the Principal Supervisor and the candidate of the outcome of the examination. It is the responsibility of the Principal Supervisor to advise Associate Supervisors of the examination outcome.

Should the candidate be dissatisfied with the outcome, he/she has the right of appeal against the decision in accordance with the University’s [Students - Academic Grievance Procedures](#).

**Stage 5: Submission of Amended Thesis**

The candidate shall prepare the amended thesis for resubmission and provide it to their Principal Supervisor for review and endorsement.

The revised thesis shall be accompanied by a resubmission letter with a table of amendments that have been made to the thesis. The table should identify where changes have been made and specify the nature of the changes.
The candidate should note that the table of amendments represents the primary document used to assess whether the candidate has addressed all requested changes. In some cases such as the correction of spelling mistakes it is acceptable for the candidate just to indicate that a correction has been made. Other corrections might require that the candidate to indicate what has been done in more detail. If in doubt, the candidate should err on the side of providing detailed information regarding the corrections made.

There may be occasions where the candidate shall disagree with a recommended change. In such cases that candidate shall include a written rebuttal addressing the relevant examiner’s comments.

**Letter of Endorsement from the Supervisor**

The Principal Supervisor checks the amended thesis to ensure that changes have been carried out in accordance with the DVCs recommendations and that the candidate has provided an accurate summary of all amendments/corrections. Once the Principal Supervisor is satisfied that all required amendments have been addressed, the Principal Supervisor shall prepare a letter of endorsement stating that the amendments have been completed in accordance with the paragraph above.

The Principal Supervisor shall provide the amended thesis with the cover letter, table of amendments and supervisor endorsement to the PVC Delegate for Faculty assessment of the amended thesis.

**Faculty Assessment of Revised Thesis**

In the first instance the revised thesis shall be assessed by the PVC Delegate. The PVC Delegate may recommend that the revised thesis can proceed to either Stage 6: Re-Examination or Stage 7: Completion and Lodgement, as per the DVC decision, provided the revised thesis complies with the direction of the DVC. If there are a few minor corrections outstanding, the PVC Delegate may recommend that the thesis be amended and then proceed to the Stage 7: Completion and Lodgement Stage.

If the revised thesis does not comply with examiner recommendations for amendments, the PVC Delegate may recommend that the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor convenes the Faculty HDR Panel to assess the revised thesis. It is preferred, where possible, that the original Faculty HDR Panel membership be retained.

Following consideration of the amended thesis, the table of amendments and the concerns raised by the Pro Vice-Chancellor, the Faculty HDR Panel may:

- Recommend that the thesis proceed to the Stage 7: Completion and Lodgement Stage, provided that the Faculty HDR Panel accepts the reasons for not complying with the examiner’s recommendations; or
- Recommend the thesis not proceed to Stage 7: Completion and Lodgement Stage and seek a ruling from the DVC. If the Faculty HDR Panel does not accept the candidate’s rebuttal for not addressing examiner concerns, the Faculty Pro Vice-Chancellor shall outline the reasons in writing.

The recommendation of the Faculty HDR Panel, and any other relevant information, will be sent to the Office of Research and Innovation for consideration by the DVC.

The DVC receives the recommendations of the Faculty HDR Panel on the revised thesis, and determines whether to uphold the decision of the HDR Panel.

The PVC Delegate, the Principal Supervisor and the candidate will be advised of the final recommendation of the DVC. It is the responsibility of the Principal Supervisor to advise Associate Supervisors of the assessment of amendments outcome.
The DVC will make the final determination as to whether the thesis is ready for lodgement, re-examination, or whether further revisions are required.

**Stage 6: Re-Examination**

Where re-examination is required, the candidate re-enrols with the University to address the issues raised by the examiners.

If the candidate has reached their maximum period of candidature, the candidate will have three (3) months from the date of written advice of examination outcome to apply, in writing, to the DVC for an extension to their candidature. The application for extension must outline the reason/s an extension is required and provide assurance that an extension will result in resubmission of the thesis; and include a detailed timeline with milestones to ensure completion within the three (3) months.

Once the Candidate has addressed the examination issues to the satisfaction of their Supervisory Panel, they re-submit the thesis, following Step 5: Submission of Amended Thesis above, including written confirmation from the Principal Supervisor that all changes have been carried out in accordance with the DVC decision.

The thesis will be re-examined by the original examiners unless:

- An examiner has advised they do not wish to examine the thesis again; or
- The DVC approves a Faculty recommendation that the thesis be sent to a subset of the original set of examiners. In such cases, the Faculty Pro Vice-Chancellor shall provide in writing to the DVC a reason for excluding members of the original panel.

The DVC shall approve the examiners for the revised thesis and the ORI invites them to re-examine the thesis.

If this is the case, the Stage 3: Examination of the Thesis and Stage 4: Evaluation of Examiners’ Reports as previously outlined in this document are then repeated.

**Stage 7: Completion and Lodgement of the Thesis**

**Completion**

When the DVC determines that a thesis is completed and ready for lodgement, the ORI will advise the candidate, the Principal Supervisor and the PVC Delegate that the candidate may proceed with hard binding of the thesis.

The thesis shall conform to the *HDR – Presentation of Thesis Procedures*, or be presented in an alternative form approved in advance of printing by the RRTC, and be accompanied by a thesis précis of no more than 150 words in language suitable for inclusion in the graduation booklet.

The Principal Supervisor checks the thesis précis to ensure it accurately reflects the thesis being presented and is compliant with preparation instructions.

**Lodgement**

The Candidate submits to the Office of Research and Innovation:

- Two permanently bound copies, both on acid-free paper, and in compliance with the *HDR – Presentation of Thesis Procedures*. 
- One electronic copy of the final version of the thesis. This shall be in Adobe Acrobat PDF format on CD and shall also comply with any other requirements specified in the HDR – Presentation of Thesis Procedures.
- The thesis précis.
- A signed Thesis Deposit Form for the CDU Library.

Upon receipt of the thesis and thesis précis, the Office of Research and Innovation provides the thesis and thesis précis to the DVC with the advice that all requirements for completion and award of the Degree have now been satisfactorily met.

The DVC acknowledges in writing to the candidate, the Principal Supervisor, the PVC Delegate and the Coordinator, Graduations, that the Candidate has completed the necessary requirements for the degree and shall recommend award of the HDR degree through the Chair of the Academic Board to Council.

The ORI updates the student system with the thesis précis and completion details.

The ORI lodges one of the print copies and the CD copy of the thesis with the University library along with the Thesis Deposit Form. The print copy will be included in the permanent collections of the library. The CD copy will be used to deposit the thesis into the University’s Open Access Institutional Repository.

Where the thesis has been identified as containing sensitive information, the candidate will negotiate with the library the conditions under which the copy of the thesis can be used and accessed.

Where a thesis contains matters affecting social, national or industrial security, commercially or culturally sensitive information, the candidate may declare the thesis to be embargoed for a specified period of time, generally not exceeding twelve (12) months.

In all other instances, the thesis will be made publicly available in keeping with the developments in open access.

The other bound copy is provided to the Principal Supervisor.

The ORI sends a copy of the Faculty recommendation to each examiner along with a statement of the DVC’s decision on the outcome of the examination.

**Graduation**

Where lodgement of the thesis is completed at least eight (8) weeks prior to the next University Graduation Ceremony, the Coordinator, Graduations includes the candidate in the next ceremony.

If lodgement is completed less than eight (8) weeks prior to the next University Graduation Ceremony, the candidate will graduate at the following ceremony.

**Examination Conflicts of Interest**

The use of independent thesis examiners is an important defining feature of Australian Higher Degrees by Research (HDR) programs. The independence of examiners is one indicator of the integrity of the examination process and the course as a whole.

The procession of examination and classification of theses assumes that examiners undertake the task independently, and without bias. Professional and personal relationships between examiners and a student and their supervisor/advisors, and relationships between examiners and the University, have the potential to introduce bias and thus reduce the independence of the examination in fact or perception. Sometimes
it is not clear to examiners and their nominees what might constitute a conflict of interest that must be declared.

Bias might be introduced to the examination process via a range of prior or current personal, professional or legal relationships between the examiner and the student, the supervisor/s, or other examiners. In addition, bias can occur when an examiner has a prior or current relationship with the University or an interest of more than an academic nature in the outcomes of the research.

Where there is a likelihood that bias might occur or be seen to occur in the context of the examination of an HDR thesis, a potential, actual, or perceived conflict of interest must be declared to the body responsible for the thesis examination (ie. the Faculty and/or Research and Research Training Committee).

Any party concerned with the examination of a thesis who becomes aware of the potential for an actual or perceived conflict of interest anywhere in the examination process has the responsibility to declare it to the Faculty or RRTC. This remains the case even if the conflict does not involve them as an individual.

When the RRTC receives a declaration of real or perceived conflict of interest with respect to an examination it must consider the matter according to this document and its own practice and determine that:

- A prima facie case of conflict of interest exists and exclude the relevant party from the examination process; or
- No prima facie case of conflict of interest exists, and allow the party to continue to be involved in the examination process.

In either case, the rationale for the determination must be recorded in the documentation associated with the examination process for the candidate in question.

There are a variety of circumstances that can lead to an actual or perceived conflict of interest. The information contained in this document below lists examples of different types of conflict of interest that can occur between the candidate and various parties including the supervisor/advisor, the University, the subject matter itself and an examiner. The examples listed are not exhaustive and should be regarded as indicative.

**Managing HDR Examination Conflicts of Interest**

In managing conflicts of interest it is useful to:

- Distinguish major (potential) conflicts of interest that would normally result in the non-appointment of the examiner from minor potential conflicts. Minor potential conflicts are ones that should be declared but would not normally, independently of other considerations, inhibit the appointment of the examiner; and
- Recognise that some conflicts of interest arising through collaboration on publications and/or research grants, or membership of an advisory board, may be mitigated by the size of the teams and a corresponding relative independence of some members of the team. In some case, members of a research team may never have met or undertaken personal correspondence.

In managing the conflict of interest it is useful to remember that the purpose is to ensure the independence of the examination in both fact and perception. The design is to protect the candidate, the examiner and the University against potential negative perceptions during and beyond the examination process. There is no presumption that any individual will behave inappropriately.
It would be unreasonable to expect potential examiners to make decisions about their suitability to examine, though it is reasonable to expect them to declare conflicts of interest and to make provision for this on the examiner reporting forms.

The most frequent concerns raised by supervisors relate to conflicts of interest between an examiner and a supervisor/advisor, especially with respect to co-authorship (B6). There is occasionally an issue arising due to the need to find an independent examiner and the need to find an examiner with expertise in the field of the thesis, especially where that field is considered to be particularly narrow. However, specific expertise in the narrow field of the thesis is not the only (nor necessarily the primary) consideration in selecting a potential examiner. An examiner’s broad knowledge of the particular field of research, experience as a supervisor of HDR candidates or experience as an examiner of HDR theses, plus their broad familiarity with the expectations of Australian HDR courses are all considered in the selection of appropriate examiners.

Contact between Candidates and Examiners

On the issue of formal and informal contact between the candidate and potential examiners (A2), there is no conflict of interest between candidates and examiners when candidates:

- Attend conferences organised by a potential examiner;
- Attend conferences and meet a potential examiner;
- Present papers in a department at which a potential examiner works; and/or
- Submit papers to a journal edited by a potential examiner.

As a general rule, a conflict of interest exists where a potential examiner has worked with the candidate on matters of synthesis or analysis or has maintained a correspondence or other contact over an extended period in which the research has been discussed.

Examples of Potential or Actual Conflicts of Interest

Conflicts of interest may include but are not limited to:

### Conflict with the Candidate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Nature of Conflict of Interest</th>
<th>Severity</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Examiner has co-authored a paper with the Candidate within the last five years</td>
<td>Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>Examiner has worked with the Candidate on matters regarding the thesis eg. previous member of the advisory team</td>
<td>Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3</td>
<td>Examiner has employed the Candidate or been employed by the Candidate within the last five years</td>
<td>Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4</td>
<td>Examiner is in negotiation to directly employ or be employed by the Candidate</td>
<td>Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A5</td>
<td>Examiner has acted as a referee for the Candidate for employment</td>
<td>Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Relationship</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A6</td>
<td>Examiner is a known relative of the Candidate</td>
<td>Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A7</td>
<td>Examiner is a friend, associate or mentor of the Candidate</td>
<td>Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A8</td>
<td>Examiner and the Candidate have an existing or previous emotional relationship of de facto, are co-residents or are members of a common household</td>
<td>Major</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legal Relationship</td>
<td>Severity</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A9 Examiner is or was married to the Candidate</td>
<td>Major</td>
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<tr>
<td>A10 Examiner is legally family to the Candidate (for example, step-father, sister-in-law)</td>
<td>Major</td>
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<tr>
<td>A11 Examiner is either a legal guardian or dependent of the Candidate or has power of attorney for the Candidate</td>
<td>Major</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business, Professional and/or Social Relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A12 Examiner is currently in or has had a business relationship with the Candidate in the last five years (for example, partner in a small business)</td>
<td>Major</td>
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<tr>
<td>A13 Examiner is in a social relationship with the Candidate, such as co-Trustees of a Will or a god-parent</td>
<td>Major</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>A14 Examiner has a current professional relationship, such as shared membership of a Board or Committee (including editorial and grant decision boards), with the Candidate</td>
<td>Minor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A15 Examiner has had personal contact with the Candidate that may give rise to the perception that the examiner may be dealing with the Candidate in a less than objective manner</td>
<td>Minor</td>
<td></td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Conflict with the Supervisor/Advisor</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>#</td>
<td>Nature of Conflict of Interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Relationship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>Examiner was a Candidate of the supervisor within the past five years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>Examiner has co-supervised with the supervisor in the past five years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B3</td>
<td>Examiner holds a patent with the supervisor granted no more than eight years ago and which is still in force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B4</td>
<td>Examiner had directly employed or was employed by the supervisor in the past five years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B5</td>
<td>Examiner holds a current grant with the supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B6</td>
<td>Examiner has co-authored a publication with the supervisor in the past five years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Relationship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B7</td>
<td>Examiner is in negotiation to directly employ or be employed by the supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B8</td>
<td>Examiner is a known relative of the supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B9</td>
<td>Examiner and the supervisor have an existing or previous emotional relationship of de facto, are co-residents or are members of a common household</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Relationship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B10</td>
<td>Examiner is or was married to the supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B11</td>
<td>Examiner is legally family (for example, step-father, sister-in-law) to the supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B12</td>
<td>Examiner is either a legal guardian or dependent of the supervisor or has power of attorney for the supervisor</td>
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</table>
Business, Professional and/or Social Relationship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Nature of Conflict of Interest</th>
<th>Severity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B13</td>
<td>Examiner is currently in or has had a business relationship with the supervisor in the last five years (for example, partner in a small business or employment)</td>
<td>Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B14</td>
<td>Examiner is in a social relationship with the supervisor, such as co-Trustees of a Will or god-parent</td>
<td>Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B15</td>
<td>Examiner has a current professional relationship, such as shared membership of a Board or Committee (including editorial and grant decision boards), with the supervisor</td>
<td>Minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B16</td>
<td>Examiner has had personal contact with the supervisor that may give rise to the perception that the examiner may be dealing with the Candidate in a less than objective manner</td>
<td>Minor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mitigating circumstances may exist. For example the grant in question might be held by a large consortium of independent researchers.

Mitigating circumstances may exist. For example the publication in question might have a very large author list and the examiner and supervisor might not have engaged in direct collaboration.

C. Conflict with the University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Nature of Conflict of Interest</th>
<th>Severity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>Examiner is currently in negotiation with the University for a work contract (other than examining thesis)</td>
<td>Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>Examiner is currently working for the University pro bono (for example, on a review)</td>
<td>Minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3</td>
<td>Examiner has examined for the University two or more times in the past 12 months and/or five or more times in the past five years</td>
<td>Minor(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C4</td>
<td>Examiner has received an Honorary Doctorate from the University within the past five years</td>
<td>Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C5</td>
<td>Examiner graduated from the University within the past five years</td>
<td>Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C6</td>
<td>Examiner has/had a formal grievance with the University</td>
<td>Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C7</td>
<td>Examiner is a current member of staff or has a current Honorary, Adjunct or Emeritus position with the University or has had such a position during the candidature of the Candidate or in the past five years</td>
<td>Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C8</td>
<td>Examiner has a current professional relationship with the University (for example, membership of a Board or Committee)</td>
<td>Minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C9</td>
<td>Examiner has a current Visiting position with the University or has had such a position during the candidature of the Candidate or in the past five years</td>
<td>Minor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mitigating circumstances may exist. For example the examiner might have examined Candidates across different schools of the University.

Conflict with the Subject Matter
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Nature of Conflict of Interest</th>
<th>Severity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>D1</td>
<td>Examiner has a direct commercial interest in the outcomes of the research</td>
<td>Major</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Conflict with Other Examiners**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Nature of Conflict of Interest</th>
<th>Severity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Working Relationship</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>E1</td>
<td>Examiner works in the same department/school as another examiner</td>
<td>Major</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal Relationship</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2</td>
<td>Examiner is married to, closely related to or has a close personal or professional relationship with another examiner</td>
<td>Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional Relationship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E3</td>
<td>Examiner has a professional relationship with another examiner</td>
<td>Minor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ESSENTIAL SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

**Internal**

- [Common Course Rules- Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)](link)
- [Common Course Rules- Masters by Research](link)
- [HDR - Presentation of Thesis Procedures](link)
- [Recommendation of Examiners Form (HDR-25)](link)
- [Students - Academic Grievance Procedures](link)
- [Supervisor’s Certification for Submission of an HDR Thesis for Examination Form](link)
### Document History and Version Control

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version</th>
<th>Date Approved</th>
<th>Approved by</th>
<th>Brief Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>10 Mar 2006</td>
<td>Academic Board</td>
<td>Creation of original document and upload to CDU website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>5 Sep 2007</td>
<td>Manager research branch</td>
<td>Reworded section regarding lodgement ‘step’: (p.7) From: 2 copies sent to library and 1 copy sent to supervisor – graduation officer notified To: 1 hard copy and the cd copy sent to library and 1 hard copy sent to supervisor – graduation officer notified and sent thesis précis. Reworded section on lodgement ‘summary’: From: two copies of the thesis shall be lodged with the university library, one of these copies shall be printed on acid free paper (note that the majority of paper purchased from major suppliers is acid Free). The other copy shall be lodged with the faculty/ ias, To: one permanently bound copy and the electronic copy of the thesis shall be lodged with the university library. The permanently bound copy shall be printed on acid free paper (note that the majority of paper purchased from major suppliers is acid free). The other copy shall be lodged with the faculty/ ias, to become the property of the supervisor. Added a new dot point in appendix 4: (p.17) 6.3 the candidate shall submit two permanently bound copies and one electronic copy (on cd) of the final version of the thesis to the research office. The thesis shall conform to the guidelines for presentation of thesis or be presented in an alternative form approved by the panel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>5 Nov 2007</td>
<td>Manager research branch</td>
<td>Phase 2, page 3, step 1: update web links. Appendix 4, page 17 point 5.1.2. Change to recommended journal abbreviations.</td>
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<td>1.03</td>
<td>16 Jun 2008</td>
<td>RDSO research office</td>
<td>Deleted from the examiner’s report proforma (appendix 4, pages 13 and 14): • From the recommendation table in section one “the candidate be required to submit to written, oral or</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Governance Document once printed is considered an uncontrolled document. Only documents in the University Governance Document Library online are considered to be the most current version.
practical examinations, as the panel considers desirable”. Points renumbered as appropriate.
- From section two report to candidate “further oral or practical examination required before a recommendation can be made. (please specify the exact nature of this examination)”. Renumbering not required as last point in sequence

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<table>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1.04</strong></td>
<td><strong>30 May 2008</strong></td>
<td><strong>Chair of academic board</strong></td>
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</table>
|   |   | Replaced “professional doctorate” with “research professional doctorate” or just higher degree by research (hdr) as appropriate to clarify that only the research professional doctorates are a hdr.

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<td><strong>16 Jun 2008</strong></td>
<td><strong>RDSO research office</strong></td>
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</table>
|   |   | Deleted from examiners report proforma:
|   |   | - From the recommendations tables in section one “the candidate be required to submit to a written, oral or practical examinations as specified in this report” points renumbered as appropriate.
|   |   | - From section two report to the candidate “further oral or practical examination required before a recommendation can be made. (please specify the exact nature of this examination).” Renumbering not required.

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<td><strong>3 Mar 2010</strong></td>
<td><strong>Governance</strong></td>
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|   |   | - Change process into new process format.
|   |   | - Change deputy vice-chancellor research to deputy vice-chancellor research and international to reflect title change.
|   |   | - Change research office to office of research and innovation to reflect title change.

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<td><strong>2.00</strong></td>
<td><strong>30 Jul 2010</strong></td>
<td><strong>Academic Board</strong></td>
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</table>
|   |   | Major review including:
|   |   | - Converted document in to new template
|   |   | - Amend research committee to research and research training committee to reflect title change.
|   |   | - Amend executive dean to pro vice-chancellor to reflect title change.

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<td><strong>Governance</strong></td>
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</table>
|   |   | - Converted to new Procedure format, combining former Process and Guidelines documents.
|   |   | - Timeline for Selection and Approval of Examiners reduced.
|   |   | - Modified candidate input into selection of examiners.
|   |   | - Clarification of role of Reserve Examiner.
|   |   | - Provision for Associate Supervisor to comment on final draft of thesis.
|   |   | - Provision for invoking Reserve Examiner, if desired, when an Examiner fails to respond within 12 weeks.
|   |   | - Specified format of electronic version of thesis.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Category</th>
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<td>3.01</td>
<td>13 Aug 2013</td>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>• Modification to library use of deposited thesis.</td>
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<td>• Addition of Examination Conflicts of Interest section</td>
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<td>3.02</td>
<td>11 Aug 2017</td>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>• Assigned document number</td>
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<td>3.03</td>
<td>21 Oct 2020</td>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>• Conversion to new Governance template due to new University branding</td>
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