

HDR Thesis Submission and Examination Policy

Section 1 - Overview and Scope

(1) This Policy establishes the requirements for the preparation, submission and examination of Higher Degree by Research (HDR) theses at the University of New England.

(2) The HDR thesis is the complete body of assessable work submitted by a HDR Candidate for examination for a HDR award.

(3) This Policy applies to:

- a. all HDR Candidates enrolled in a Higher Degree by Research at the University of New England;
- b. all HDR Supervisors as defined in the [HDR Supervision Policy](#); and
- c. all UNE Representatives.

(4) Within this Policy:

- a. Part A states the principles of this policy;
- b. Part B covers HDR thesis submission requirements;
- c. Part C covers HDR thesis examination requirements;
- d. Part D covers examination avenues of appeal;
- e. Part E covers submission of final HDR thesis;
- f. Part F covers graduation requirements; and
- g. Part G covers roles and responsibilities of UNE Staff.

Section 2 - Policy

Part A - Policy Principles

(5) This Policy ensures that:

- a. HDR Candidates are provided ongoing training and education that promotes and supports responsible research conduct, including the provision of clearly defined expectations related to the submission and examination of a HDR thesis;
- b. HDR Candidates are provided with appropriate guidance and mentorship on responsible research through effective supervision, and where appropriate, monitoring of their conduct;
- c. academic governance processes and structures maintain academic oversight of research and research training quality, including the examination of HDR theses;
- d. appropriate environment, induction, supervisory arrangements and resources that support research training are in place to support the successful and timely submission of HDR thesis;

- e. the research theses of HDR Candidates are recorded, and records are current; and
- f. the University has clear and transparent procedures for the nomination and appointment of examiners, the identification of inappropriate examiners, a timely examination process, the evaluation of examiners' reports, and mechanisms for appeal and conflicts of interest.

Part B - HDR Thesis Submission Requirements

Thesis Requirements

- (6) On submission of the HDR thesis the HDR Candidate must certify that they have complied with:
- a. any ethics approvals given; and
 - b. their research data management plan and report to their Supervisor; and
 - c. the mode of examination.
- (7) The HDR thesis must adhere to the principles of research integrity as stipulated in the Australian Code for Responsible Conduct of Research including authorship, plagiarism and research ethics.
- (8) The HDR thesis submission requirements are in accordance with the HDR Candidate's course rules as published in the [UNE Course Rules \(Course Catalogue\)](#) in the year of commencement.
- (9) The HDR Candidate must submit to the Graduate Research School the HDR thesis electronically in PDF format and other required documents in an appropriate electronic means.
- (10) The HDR thesis must be written in English.
- (11) The HDR thesis must be the HDR Candidate's own work and any contribution by other people or sources, including co-authors of papers, must be clearly stated.
- (12) The HDR thesis should not normally exceed 80,000 words for a doctoral degree and should not normally exceed 40,000 for a masters by research degree, considering discipline standards. Exceptions to these word limits must be approved by the Dean, Graduate Research.
- (13) The HDR Candidate must not submit a HDR thesis that has not been completed during candidature or that has any work that has been the basis of the award of a degree at this or another University.
- (14) The HDR Candidate and Supervisors will ensure the HDR thesis complies with the [Research Data Management Policy](#).
- (15) The Principal Supervisor must certify in writing that the HDR thesis has been prepared and submitted in compliance with the [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](#) and other relevant UNE policies prior examination.
- (16) Where a HDR thesis has been submitted without endorsement from the Principal Supervisor, the Associate Dean, Research (or delegate) will determine whether the HDR thesis is of an appropriate standard and is consistent with discipline standards.
- (17) The Associate Dean, Research, after consultation with appropriate stakeholders (discipline representative, HDR Coordinator, Head of School etc) may determine not to proceed with the examination of a HDR thesis as a result of one or a combination of the following reasons:
- a. the Principal Supervisor does not certify that it is ready for examination;
 - b. it exceeds the prescribed word limits without prior approval to do so;

- c. suitable examiners, as determined by the Associate Dean, Research (or delegate), cannot be found;
- d. the HDR Candidate requests withdrawal from examination and the Associate Dean, Research determines their justification to do so;
- e. the HDR Candidate has not successfully completed the required research training activities, including any required units of study; and
- f. there is a finding of inappropriate academic practice, research misconduct or a breach of the [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](#) (2018).

(18) The HDR Candidate has the right to appeal using the appropriate grievance process on any aspect of clause 17(a-f).

Thesis Format

(19) The HDR thesis is defined as a substantial and intellectually coherent product or product(s) using one or more media such as a thesis, dissertation and artefacts, or exegesis and portfolio of creative works and/or performance.

(20) The HDR Candidate shall submit for examination a HDR thesis in a format aligned with the HDR Thesis Format Guidelines and HDR Thesis Examination and Submission Procedures in a format approved by their School.

Part C - Examination Requirements

(21) HDR Candidates and their Principal Supervisor (with the Co-Supervisors, where applicable) should discuss a pool of examiners suitable for the Higher Degree by Research thesis examination three months prior to thesis submission.

(22) Examiners must:

- a. have international standing in the field of research;
- b. be independent of the conduct of the research;
- c. be competent to undertake the assessment;
- d. not have a conflict of interest which cannot be, or is not, appropriately managed; and
- e. have a qualification equivalent to the level being examined and in accordance with the [AQF plus 1 and Professional Experience Equivalence Policy](#).

(23) The University should take all reasonable steps to ensure that examiners:

- a. are free from bias for or against the student or the Supervisors;
- b. are free from actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interests;
- c. preserve the principles of confidentiality as outlined in the Guidelines for Examiners; and
- d. must not use generative AI to form their reports.

(24) A person must not be an examiner if they:

- a. have been directly involved in the HDR Candidate's research;
 - b. are a co-author of any part of the work;
 - c. have a past or current close personal relationship with the student or any member of the supervisory team;
 - d. have had extensive professional contact with the HDR Candidate or any member of the supervisory team in any other circumstances which might jeopardise the independence, or the perceived independence, of the examination;
 - e. have been a research student or Supervisor of any member of the supervisory team within the last five years;
- or

f. have supervised the student at any time.

(25) At least one month prior to submission, the Principal Supervisor must complete a [Recommendation of Examiners Form](#).

(26) The approved set of examiners that have been recommended and appointed must remain confidential from the student.

(27) The Principal Supervisor will obtain written consent from each examiner, except the reserve, to complete the examination.

(28) If UNE Representatives, including academic and professional staff, communicate with an examiner they must not make any comment which could be seen as influencing, or having the potential to influence, the examination outcome.

(29) HDR Candidates and their Supervisors must not communicate with the examiners, regarding their thesis or examination, during the examination process.

(30) If a HDR Candidate or their Supervisors communicate with an examiner during the examination process:

- a. the examination may be discontinued; and if discontinued
- b. a new examination process must commence with newly commissioned examiners.

Examination Outcome

(31) Determinations of examination outcomes are made by the Graduate Research Committee and are informed by examiners' reports and recommendations or other relevant evidence.

(32) The Graduate Research Committee will resolve one of the following:

- a. that the degree be awarded without changes;
- b. that the degree be awarded conditional upon making amendments as appropriate (the candidate has up to six (6) months to submit their amended HDR thesis);
- c. that the HDR Candidate revise and re-submit the HDR thesis for re-examination (the candidate has up to twelve (12) months to submit their revised HDR thesis);
- d. award a master by research degree with or without changes (available to doctoral candidates only); and
- e. that the degree not be awarded (non-award).

Examination of Joint PhD Degrees

(33) For joint PhD degrees the examination processes to be used must be specified in the formal agreement.

Part D - Avenue of Appeal

(34) Staff and HDR Candidates involved in an appeal against a Higher Degree by Research thesis examination outcome must be treated fairly, equitably, and with respect, and must meet confidentiality and privacy requirements.

General Requirements

(35) A HDR Candidate whose HDR thesis has been classified as 'non-award' by the Graduate Research Committee, may appeal within twenty (20) working days of the written notification of the 'non-award classification'.

(36) Appeals will be permitted only on one, or a combination of, the following grounds:

- a. procedural irregularities in the examination of the HDR thesis or in the conduct of any examination which forms part of the determination of the result. In this case it is necessary for the student to demonstrate that an aspect(s) of the examination process was not appropriately followed and that this caused, or was likely to have substantially contributed to, the 'non-award' classification; and/or
- b. documented evidence of bias on the part of one or more of the examiners; and/or
- c. there is new evidence of factors outside your control that impaired your candidacy, which:
 - i. you could not reasonably have been expected to provide at the time the original decision was made; and
 - ii. would have been a significant factor in the original decision.

Stage I

(37) An appeal is to be provided in writing and addressed to the Dean, Graduate Research.

(38) The Dean, Graduate Research will assess the appeal. The Dean, Graduate Research will uphold, vary or dismiss the appeal with the resulting actions:

- a. Upheld: recommendation provided by the Dean, Graduate Research; or
- b. Vary: submit a written recommendation under the same or different provisions as the original examiners; or
- c. Denied: the classification of the thesis be confirmed.

(39) The decision of the Dean, Graduate Research constitutes the final academic appeal avenue within the university.

(40) Notifications to the HDR Candidate of the outcome of an appeal will be provided in writing within twenty (20) working days and include:

- a. the details and reasons for each decision;
- b. advice on any further steps in the appeals process, including their right to lodge a complaint with the [NSW Ombudsman](#) at any stage; and
- c. where relevant, advice that UNE will maintain their enrolment while the appeal process is ongoing.

(41) If the appeal process results in a decision that supports the HDR Candidate, the University will immediately implement any decision and/or correction and preventative action required and will advise the candidate of the outcome.

(42) Where an appeal outcome can result in confirmation that a Student Visa Holder's enrolment will be suspended or terminated, the HDR Candidate must be advised that the decision will be notified to the Department of Education and may impact on their student visa. UNE International must be notified of such an appeal.

(43) An appellant is entitled to be accompanied by one independent individual (such as advocates from UNE Life Advocacy and Welfare) for advice and support at any relevant meetings and discussions relating to the appeal.

Stage II

(44) An appellant may be entitled to a secondary level of internal appeal if they can demonstrate the policy and/or procedure was applied incorrectly during the Stage I appeal review.

(45) An appeal is to be provided in writing within twenty (20) working days and addressed to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research.

(46) The Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research will investigate the case and determine if the policy and/or procedure was applied correctly. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research will uphold or dismiss the appeal and ensure the HDR

Candidate is informed of their decision and reasoning. If the appeal is upheld, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research will ensure implementation of any required action.

(47) The decision of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research constitutes the final appeal avenue within the University.

Part E - Submission of Final HDR thesis

(48) Any HDR thesis containing previously published material must have written approval of the copyright owner to include materials in the electronic copy as outlined in UNE's [Copyright Policy](#).

Part F - Graduation

(49) For Higher Degree by Research awards, the Council delegates to the Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer, and to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research, the authority to approve the conferral of an award to a student who has met the requirements to graduate from a Higher Degree by Research Course at the University.

(50) A HDR Candidate is eligible to graduate from the course in which they are enrolled if they have met the requirements in Clause 19(a)(i-v) of the [Graduation Rule](#).

(51) HDR Candidates must satisfy the requirements of their HDR candidature as published in the [UNE Course Rules \(Course Catalogue\)](#) in the year of commencement in order to qualify for graduation.

(52) HDR Candidates are not deemed graduates until the University has conferred their degree.

(53) For the purpose of assisting verification of the entitlement of a graduate to professional accreditation, the University may release to an agency or authority, approved by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research, information concerning an HDR Candidate's academic and graduate status. Any information released before conferment, shall be accompanied by a statement that graduate status remains subject to conferment.

(54) On the recommendation of the Executive Principal Brand Partnerships and Business Development, in consultation with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research, the Council may approve the incorporation of a UNE partner's logo and/or name into an official Testamur of the University of New England.

Rescission of an Award

(55) The Council may rescind conferment of an award for reasons which include, but are not limited to:

- a. a graduate wishing to have the award rescinded;
- b. an administrative error has resulted in the conferral of an award for which the HDR Candidate was not eligible;
or
- c. an HDR Candidate or former HDR Candidate is in breach of a rule or policy of the University where rescission of an award is a valid penalty for such a breach.

(56) The decision to rescind the conferral of an award is made by Council on the recommendation of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research.

(57) The Council's decision is final.

Part G - Roles and Responsibilities

(58) HDR Candidates are responsible for:

- a. complying with this Policy;
- b. identifying any concerns that they may have with their higher degree by research thesis examination process as soon as possible after receipt of the Higher Degree by Research thesis examination outcome; and
- c. complying with this policy and the related procedures in requesting a review of or appealing the outcomes of the Higher Degree by Research thesis examination.

(59) Staff are responsible for becoming familiar and complying with this policy and the related procedures.

(60) Principal Supervisors are responsible for:

- a. certifying in writing that the HDR thesis has been prepared and submitted in compliance with the [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](#) 2018 and other relevant UNE policies prior to examination; and
- b. ensuring that appropriate examiners are identified and available at the time a candidate submits the thesis.

(61) The Chair of Examiners is responsible for:

- a. reviewing and endorsing the [Recommendation of Examiners Form](#) in accordance with examination requirements;
- b. reviewing Examiners' Reports and Recommended Outcomes and providing academic advice about the examination outcome and the matters raised in the Examiners' Reports to the Graduate Research Committee; and
- c. checking Thesis Amendments against Examiners' Reports and Recommendations.

(62) Dean, Graduate Research is responsible for:

- a. assessing Stage I appeals of examination outcomes recommended by the Graduate Research Committee;
- b. making determinations of degree outcome based on recommendations from the Graduate Research Committee or delegate; and
- c. notifying students of a non-award determination of their Stage I appeal.

(63) Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research is responsible for:

- a. assessing and making final determinations on the outcome of a Stage II non-award appeal; and
- b. advising the HDR Candidate of the outcome of their Stage II appeal.

Section 3 - Authority and Compliance

Authority

(64) The Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer (VC&CEO) pursuant to Section 29 of the [University of New England Act 1993 \(NSW\)](#), makes this University policy.

(65) The Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research is authorised to make procedures and processes for the effective implementation and operation of this policy, and to publish as associated documents any tool that will assist with compliance.

Compliance

(66) UNE Representatives and HDR Candidates must observe this policy in relation to HDR thesis submissions and

examinations. Non-compliance may be a breach of the Code of Conduct and may be addressed under the disciplinary provisions of the relevant Enterprise Agreement.

(67) This policy is consistent with all legislative standards and regulatory frameworks, including the [Higher Education Support Act \(HESA\)](#), the [Higher Education Standards Framework \(HESF\)](#), the [Education Services for Overseas Students Act \(ESOS Act\)](#) and the [National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students](#). Further information regarding compliance obligations is available via the Compliance Register.

(68) This policy operates as and from the Effective Date. Previous policy on Higher Degree by Research thesis submission and examination are replaced and have no further operation from the Effective Date.

(69) Notwithstanding the other provisions of this policy, the Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer may approve an exception to this policy where the Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer determines the application of this policy would otherwise lead to an unfair, unreasonable or absurd outcome. Approvals by the Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer under this clause must be documented in writing and must state the reason for the exception.

Section 4 - Quality Assurance

(70) The implementation of this Policy will be supported through:

- a. the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research regularly monitoring and providing an annual report to Academic Board on the operation of, and compliance with, this Policy.

Section 5 - Definitions (specific to this policy)

(71) Recission - means the cancellation, or repeal of a decision or award.

(72) Testamur - is the legal document you receive after graduation. Also known as a 'Degree certificate' or 'parchment', Testamurs are the legal certification that your degree has been conferred.

(73) In Absentia - means in the absence of the indicated person(s).

(74) Chair of Examiners - is an experienced academic staff member of the University of New England who is responsible for academic matters regarding the HDR candidate's thesis examination as outlined in the HDR Thesis Submission and Examination Procedure. The Chair of Examiners must hold a degree equivalent to or greater than the one under examination, must be familiar with the research discipline(s) represented in the candidate's thesis, and must not be a current or former member of the supervision team.

Status and Details

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| Unit Head | Chris Armstrong Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research |
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Glossary Terms and Definitions

"UNE Representative" - Means a University employee (casual, fixed term and permanent), contractor, agent, appointee, UNE Council member, adjunct, visiting academic and any other person engaged by the University to undertake some activity for or on behalf of the University. It includes corporations and other bodies falling into one or more of these categories.

"HDR Candidate" - Means a Higher Degree Research student.

"Effective Date" - means the Rule/Policy takes effect on the day on which it is published, or such later day as may be specified in the policy document.