

Higher Degree Research Examination Policy

Fact box

- **Policy owner:** Director of Research
- **Policy category:** Academic: Research
- **Policy status:** Approved
- **Approval body:** Academic Board
- **Endorsement body:** Research Committee
- **Related policies:**
 - [Higher Degree Research Candidature Policy](#)
 - [Research Supervision Policy](#)
- **Last amended:** 22nd April 2025
- **Relevant HESF:** 4.2

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline the procedures to regulate the examination of an Alphacrucis University College (AC) Higher Degree Research (HDR) thesis or portfolio.

Scope

All delivery sites of AC.

Policy

Research theses and portfolios completed by AC HDR candidates are examined by appropriately qualified external experts. The HDR examination process is an integral part of ensuring the academic quality, originality and integrity of AC courses. It adheres to international benchmarking standards and promotes dissemination of the research.

Examiners

Each Honours, Master of Philosophy (MPhil), Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and Doctor of Ministry (DMin) thesis/portfolio is examined by a minimum of two external examiners. HDR examiners must:

- be of international standing in the field and external to AC (both for PhD and DMin and at least one for MPhil and Honours);
- be research active in the field;
- hold a doctorate degree or equivalent to the one of the thesis/portfolio being examined;
- not have any relevant conflicts of interest.

Conflict of Interest

Appointment of examiners should consider any real or potential conflict of interest. A conflict of interest will normally result in the non-appointment of an examiner. AC adheres to the [Australian](#)

[Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research \(2018\)](#) which requires researchers to identify, manage and declare circumstances and associations that may give rise to a conflict of interest.

President's Doctoral Research Medal

AC is committed to excellence in research training. AC President's Doctoral Research Medal aims to recognise and reward HDR graduands who demonstrate creativity, innovation and excellence in research training.

Responsible for implementation

Director of Research

Key stakeholders

HDR candidates, supervisors, Graduate Research School Faculty

Procedures

HDR Examination Procedures

Appointment of Examiners

Prior to selection of potential examiners, the candidate is asked by the principal supervisor to list any examiners they wish to exclude due to conflict of interest or other reasons. Four potential examiners are suggested by the principal supervisor to the Graduate Research School. This list should normally contain at least two international examiners. Potential examiners must then be approved by the Graduate Research School Director. If the Graduate Research School Director is also the candidate's supervisor, then the potential examiners should be approved by a delegate. The selected names will remain confidential. The supervisors and the candidate are not to make direct contact with the examiners until after the examination process is complete.

Submission requirements

The requirements for submission for examination are that the candidate:

1. must be currently enrolled at the time of submission;
2. cannot submit for examination before the minimum duration of candidature (2.5 years for doctoral candidates; 1 year for masters candidates), unless otherwise approved by the relevant Program Director;
3. must have successfully completed all prescribed coursework components of the program;
4. must have successfully completed all compulsory milestone reviews or received an exemption from the milestone;
5. the principal supervisor must confirm the thesis/portfolio complies with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and has been prepared so that it meets legislative requirements in relation to copyright and privacy;

6. thesis/portfolio is approved by the supervisor as being of examinable standard. If the candidate chooses to submit for examination without the approval of the supervisors, this must be noted by the candidate on the front cover of the submission.

Format of submission for examination

The thesis/portfolio shall be submitted electronically to the Learning Management System in the form specified. The thesis/portfolio must also be submitted to the Graduate Research School in both word and PDF formats.

Examination of a Research Thesis or Portfolio

Examiners are given eight weeks to complete the examination. Each examiner provides an independent detailed written report to the Graduate Research School in accordance with the AC Guidelines for HDR Examiners. If the Graduate Research School Director is also the candidate's supervisor, then the report is submitted to a delegate. The report should detail how the thesis/portfolio has or has not met the learning outcomes of the course and provide the candidate with feedback for improvements or revisions.

Examination Outcomes

The examination will have the following possible outcomes:

- **C1 passed with no changes**
- **C2 passed with minor changes** – candidates have two months to complete the changes and resubmit to the Graduate Research School for approval, including a report of the revisions completed by the candidate;
- **C3 passed with major changes** – candidates have four months to complete these changes and resubmit to the Graduate Research School for approval, including a report of the corrections and amendments completed by the candidate. If the Research Committee is dissatisfied with the changes, the candidate might be asked to make further minor changes or to revise and resubmit;
- **C4 revise and resubmit** - candidates must resubmit for examination a revised thesis/portfolio after a further period of research, substantial reorganisation or reconceptualisation. Candidates have up to 12 months to complete these changes and then re-submit the thesis/portfolio for examination. Only one resubmission is allowed. Resubmission of a thesis/portfolio follows this process:
 - either the initial examiners or alternate examiners are invited to examine the revised work at the end of the 12-month revision period;
 - examiners of the research are provided with the revised version of the thesis/portfolio and a report from the candidate listing amendments made and justification for any recommended amendments not made;

- theses/portfolios will follow the usual examination process and be graded according to the Guidelines.
- **C5 fail** - the thesis/portfolio is not of the appropriate standard for an HDR award and no further submission is allowed.

In the case of a C3 result or as otherwise specified by the AC Classification of Examinations Schedule 1, the HDR Examinations Advisory Committee (EAC) may be convened and prepares a report.

Third Examiner

If the examiners' reports are substantially different and irreconcilable, a third examiner is appointed from among the suggested examiners. If necessary, additional names should be sought from the principal supervisor. The examination result will be determined by the majority position of the three reports according to the AC Classification of Examinations Schedule 1. If two of the three examiners do not substantially agree, then an EAC may be convened.

HDR Examinations Advisory Committee

HDR EAC is an ad hoc committee of Research Committee and the terms of reference are outlined in the Academic Board Terms of Reference Policy. An HDR EAC shall strive for gender balance.

The committee is convened concerning:

- classification of disparate examiners' reports in accordance with the examination classification schedules;
- amount and type of amendments or revisions to the research that may need to be made by the candidate;
- need for any additional support to be provided to the candidate in the case of a classification of revise and resubmit;
- recommendation of the appointment of a third examiner where the examiner's reports are unable to be reconciled;
- or whether, in rare cases, an examiner should be disqualified in the event that there is evidence of bias, or conflict of interest on the examiner's part, which was not disclosed at the time of appointment.

The candidate's supervisors are invited to attend the HDR EAC meeting in advisory roles. Any supervisors who attend the meeting are expected to contribute to the discussion but are not members of the committee and cannot be involved in the determination of the classification recommendation. De-identified examiners reports are provided to the supervisor/s but information within the reports must be kept confidential.

Should HDR EAC request clarification on any aspect of an examiner's report the HDR EAC Chair will notify the Graduate Research School of the query and it will be relayed to the relevant examiner/s. Direct contact with examiners must not be made by the candidate, supervisors, or members of HDR EAC.

Once the classification has been determined, the HDR EAC Chair informs the Graduate Research School Director, who informs the candidate and supervisors. In the event of a C3 or C4 recommendation being made, HDR EAC must specify the number and type of amendments or revisions required by the candidate.

Final Approval

The Graduate Research School Director determines the examination outcome, as per the AC classification of HDR examinations outlined in the AC Guidelines for HDR Examiners, based on the two examiners' reports and recommendations, and, if an HDR EAC has been convened, the Candidate's Summary Report of Revisions and/or the third examiner's report.

Award of MPhil in lieu of PhD

The Graduate Research School Director may deem that the candidate's work is not sufficient for the award of a PhD but is sufficient for the award of an MPhil. If this decision is approved, the Graduate Research School will then advise the candidate of this decision. Candidates must advise the Graduate Research School within 20 business days that the MPhil will be accepted. If the MPhil is not accepted, the Graduate Research School Director may fail the candidate.

Appeal against final examination result

Candidates whose examination has been completed and who have a C5 classification may appeal against any perceived procedural irregularities in the conduct of the thesis/portfolio examination. Complaints must adhere to the AC Complaint and Grievance Resolution Policy.

Completion of degree

Once all required revisions have been completed and approved by the Program Director, the candidate is eligible to apply to graduate. All primary research data is stored by AC for at least seven years after successful completion of the thesis. HDR candidates must submit a digital copy of the successful thesis/portfolio to the AC Library.

Additional Requirements for LOTE

For an HDR LOTE thesis/portfolio, a summary of the two examiners reports must be provided in English to the Program Director. If the HDR EAC is convened regarding a HDR LOTE thesis/portfolio, the HDR EAC must include a senior academic fluent in the language of the thesis/portfolio. The Summary Report of Revisions must be tabled to HDR EAC in English.

A title page and abstract in English must be included in the digital copy of the thesis lodged with the AC library. The translations should each immediately follow the untranslated pages in the thesis. The translation must be completed at the candidate's expense. All translations must be completed by an accredited translator.

Selection Process for the President's Doctoral Research Medal

The Research Committee annually administers the President's Doctoral Research Medal. Criteria include:

- completed doctoral course within four years FTE from the commencement of candidature;
- have had the first submission achieve an examination result of C1 or C2;
- been nominated by the principal supervisor.

The President's Doctoral Research Medal is presented at the relevant graduation ceremony, or privately by appointment.
