

GUIDELINES FOR CHAIRS OF EXAMINERS

The role of Chair of Examiners for the theses of Higher Degree by Research Students is critical in ensuring that the student's thesis meets the required standards regarding quality and comprehensiveness of presentation before it is sent out for examination. It is also critical in ensuring that, should a thesis be returned by examiners that all concerns expressed by examiners are addressed, and that the student completes the amendment in the specified time frame allowed for this purpose.

The role of Chair of Examiners is normally played by the Head of School or other organisational unit (e.g., an Institute or Centre) in which a Higher Degree by Research Student is enrolled. However, it may be appropriate to delegate this role to another, senior member of staff within the School or organisational unit, for example, where the Head of School/Institute/Centre is on extended leave, or where they themselves are the principal/associate supervisor of the student under examination **or in other circumstances as warranted**. In such cases, the Executive Dean or, where delegated, the Associate Dean (Research and Research Training) within Faculties will approve the nomination of an alternate Chair of Examiners. For an alternate to a Director of Centres and Institutes, an alternate Chair of Examiners will be approved by the Director of Postgraduate Research or the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Industry and Research).

Because of the extended group of staff who may serve as Chair of Examiners from time to time, and because the University is committed to updating its policies and procedures to reflect best practice in its Higher Degree by Research programs, the Postgraduate Research Committee has devised the Guidelines and Checklist below for Chairs of Examiners who may be new to the role or who may want a 'refresher' about the responsibilities involved in this position.

The *VU Guide to Research Degrees: Advice to Students and Supervisors* (Office for Postgraduate Research, 2008) contains up-to-date information about the preparation, submission, examination and classification of HDR theses – see in particular Sections 2.101 to 2.12.

The *Guide* is available both in hard copy and on the Office for Postgraduate Research website at

<http://www.vu.edu.au/sites/default/files/research/pdfs/guide-to-research-degrees.pdf>

Approval of nomination of examiners

The involvement of the Chair of Examiners begins with the nomination of examiners (section 2.11.4, *Guide to Research Degrees*). The examiners must be endorsed by the Head of School/Institute/Centre before being submitted for approval to the relevant Graduate Studies Committee at Faculty level.

The nominations for external examiners for research theses and professional doctorates as outlined in the *Guide to Research Degrees* should be submitted at least 2 months before the expected submission date of the thesis to ensure that there is no delay in sending out the thesis for examination once the approval process has been concluded.

Release of Thesis for Examination

Once nominated examiners have been approved, the final examination version of the thesis is submitted to the Chair of Examiners accompanied by a Release of Thesis Form.

In signing the Release of Thesis form, the Chair of Examiners is guaranteeing that in his or her judgement the thesis meets the minimum standards necessary for external examination to take place.

This means you are certifying that the thesis:

- Is complete
- Is formatted according to University guidelines for submission (*Guide to Research Degrees*, Section 2.11 – 2.11.3)
- Includes all required supplementary documentation and information at the front of the thesis:
 - a title page showing the title of the thesis, the degree for which it is submitted, the name of the School/Centre/Institute, Faculty and University in which the research was carried out, the full name of the author and the year of submission
 - an abstract (maximum 200 words)
 - a signed declaration of authenticity (*Guide to Research Degrees*, Section 2.10.3)
 - list of publications arising from the thesis (if any – only material published **prior** to submission should be included in this list, not forthcoming pieces)
 - table of contents
 - separate bibliography of references at the end of the thesis
- Conforms to the University's guidelines regarding minimum or maximum length for the degree in question (*Guide to Research Degrees*, Section 2.10.3)
- Title is as clear, concise and accurate as possible and does not exceed 150 characters on the spine of the thesis
- Is of sufficient quality and standard to be released for examination.

It is critically important that Chairs of Examiners review each thesis prior to submission to check that these guidelines have been met, particularly in regard to the length of thesis. This does not require a word-by-word reading of each thesis submitted in your School, but it does require a thorough skimming of the thesis. A rough guide to word length for a PhD thesis of 100,000 words is shown in the table below. Only in extraordinary circumstances will the Postgraduate Research Committee endorse the release of a thesis that exceeds 100,000 words in length, and even in these circumstances a demonstrated case to exceed the stipulated word-length must be made and endorsed by the principal supervisor and the School/Unit/Centre.

Table 1. Number of pages for a thesis of maximum 100,000 words and minimum 60,000 words

Font size	Spacing	Approximate number of pages for a maximum of 100,000 words	Approximate number of pages for a maximum of 60,000 words
12	Double	400	240
12	One-and-a-half	300	180
10	Double	230	138
10	One-and-a-half	200	120

Examiners' Reports and Corrections to Theses

Once the thesis is released and sent out for examination, you are responsible for reviewing the examiners' reports that are returned for the thesis. These reports will contain both a formal classification ranking indicating whether the thesis is to be passed with no changes, passed with minor amendments, deferred, etc. The report will also contain substantive comments and feedback on the thesis.

In the case of theses that have been passed, it is **essential** to note that some examiners tick the 'no changes required' box but still request changes in the body of their comments, particularly if there are typographical or other minor amendments to diagrams, charts, etc. *These corrections must be made by the student even when the 'no changes required' box is ticked* and it is the responsibility of the Chair of Examiners to ensure that these corrections are duly addressed.

For theses that have been passed by examiners but require corrections, the Chair of Examiners should meet or otherwise correspond with the student and the principal supervisor to agree on the scope and nature of the changes required and the timelines within which this will take place, to a maximum of 12 months.

When the thesis is amended, three further documents need to accompany submission of the revised thesis to the Office for Postgraduate Research for final classification:

- a **memo from the student** addressing each examiner's required changes and an itemised list of amendments in table format. Where a required change is not made, for example, where examiners require contradictory changes, the absence of change should be indicated and the justification explicitly addressed.
- a **letter from the Principal Supervisor** stating that these changes have been made to their satisfaction and recommending that the thesis be classified as 'passed'
- a 'Classification of Thesis' form completed and signed by the Chair of Examiners. In determining the classification category for each thesis, which relies on the total combination of results received from all examiners, please use the 'Procedure for Classification of Theses/Major Work', available at www.vu.edu.au/postgrad, to assist you in making this determination.

In the case of theses that have been either deferred or failed, the role played by Chairs of Examiners is more complex. Please read carefully through Sections 2.12.1 – 2.12.2 of the *Guide to Research Degrees* for information on how to handle deferred or failed theses.

Approval of classification recommendation

Once the thesis is recommended as passed by the Postgraduate Research Sub-Committee, the Director, Office for Postgraduate Research will forward confirmation to the Education and Research Board (ERB) delegate for sign off that the student has satisfied the requirements for the award. The ERB delegate then recommends to the University Council or an approved delegate of Council. Following Council approval, the student is then eligible to graduate with the relevant research degree.

In addition to the information contained in the *Guide to Research Degrees*, if you have any queries or concerns in your role as Chair of Examiners, please contact:

- The Faculty Associate Dean (Research and Research Training)
- The Director, Office for Postgraduate Research (extension 4587)
- The DVC (Research and Research Training) (extension 4020)
- The University Examinations Officer (extension 5014)

SUMMARY OF STAGES IN THE EXAMINATION PROCESS

<p>STAGE 1 Before examination of a thesis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Names of nominated examiners approved by Chair of Examiners and submitted by principal supervisor to Faculty Graduate Studies Committee at least 2 months before submission
<p>STAGE 2 At point of submission of a thesis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the thesis to ensure it is of sufficient quality and is formatted appropriately for release to examiners • Sign the Release of Thesis form, certifying that the thesis meets all required guidelines for submission and contains all relevant documentation
<p>STAGE 3 After the examination of a thesis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confer with student and principal supervisor regarding any required amendments by any or all examiners – these are to be completed within twelve months • submit the revised thesis, together with <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. a memo from the student addressing the examiners' comments and an itemised list in a table format of the amendments made and justification for not making amendments 2. a letter from the Principal Supervisor endorsing the changes and recommending that the thesis be passed 3. a 'Classification of Thesis' form completed and signed by the Chair of Examiners (refer to the 'Procedure for Classification of Theses/Major Work' at www.vu.edu.au/postgrad) <p>to the Office for Postgraduate Research.</p>