

Victoria University

Supporting Information for Examining the Doctor of Education (Ed D) Degree

Context

The Doctor of Education degree is a research degree which focuses on the practice of education. As is stated in the *Guidelines for Examiners of Research Degrees*, it is designed to assist candidates to develop new information or insight into their professional area. The candidates for this degree are drawn from a wide variety of educational contexts including schools, Technical and Further Education (TAFE), higher education, adult, community and workplace education. Many practise within educational institutions and others are concerned with professional education in their own field, such as health, management, government and industrial settings. It should also be noted that many candidates practise outside the context of Australian culture as the school has a significant offshore enrolment and other candidates have been working outside Australia whilst undertaking their research.

The thesis component is expected to be **50,000 words** and constitutes two-thirds of the degree. Because the project is an investigation into practice or to extend knowledge underpinning practice, many candidates employ qualitative methodologies including action research, evaluation research and narrative enquiry. A professional doctorate may extend the bounds of traditional research frameworks. In professional practice research, the researcher may be at the centre of the research process and the concept of rigour is related to clear and careful recording with reflection and insight (Anderson and Heer, 1999).

It is intended that the degree be awarded after the examiners are satisfied that the candidate has demonstrated:

- A thorough understanding of the relevant techniques in the field of research;
- Competence in the professional area through judicious selection and application of methods to yield a significant body of work;
- Capacity to critically evaluate and effectively present this body of work;
- Independence of thought and approach;
- An original contribution to practice and knowledge within the profession.

Points to consider in reading the Doctor of Education thesis

Examiners are invited to consider the following elements in terms of alternative approaches to conventional doctoral requirements.

Engagement with the literature

It is expected that the candidate will have engaged with a significant body of literature although it is not intended that they should necessarily have the level of discipline mastery that might be expected in a traditional PhD. In action research, for example, the issue is how the candidate has engaged with the literature to provide insights into the results of the data collection and reflection. Candidates should show how literature have given insights into their thinking, has challenged assumptions and enabled them to look at different aspects of practice or at practice in different ways. The use of literature with a different focus to the context or viewpoint of the research should be seen positively. Critical analysis of literature rather than summary or the presentation of one view is to be expected.

Intellectual grasp

The Victoria University *Guidelines for Examiners of Research Degrees* indicates that *the purpose of a professional doctorate is to extend knowledge that will clearly impact on professional practice rather than develop theoretical arguments. This does not mean that theory will not be extended but this will not be the focus.* Candidates' work may involve the connection of theory and practice, show the future development of the work, or give a reflexive, self-critical account of the inquiry. It may also involve a systematic account of an inquiry to improve a specific area of practice such as the teaching of English or the development of a work practice component for technical education. Here past research and theory should inform the approach and be used for critical analysis or consideration of alternatives.

Candidates should have a strong grasp of the application of their chosen methodology and its relevance to their research question.

Professional practice development and originality

It is intended that research for the Doctor of Education should be innovative, creative, present new frameworks or open up neglected areas. It should attempt to solve a problem or provide original data in relation to identified issues. Examiners are asked to consider originality in context. For example, educational reform in Thailand is introducing new approaches that are quite established in Australia, such as student based learning and work practice placement. The use of established techniques in new contexts is to be valued. Independent research and evaluation and the encouragement of research and innovation by others in a collaborative context should both be seen positively.

Presentation

The thesis should be clear, easy to read and presented in an appropriate style. It should contain few errors of expression. Some presentations, particularly those based on action research, may present a product or outcome (curriculum, policy statement or report for example) as well as the account of the process.

Coherence

The thesis should display a coherent structure and be cogently organised and expressed. It may present the researcher's learning as a journey of argument and discovery.

Publishability

To be of publishable quality is a usual criterion for the assessment of doctoral work. Candidates should be clear of their audience and publication to communities of practice or in practitioner journals should also be seen as valid outcomes of their research.

In conclusion

Winter et al (2000) point to the roots of the term 'doctorate' in the Latin verb docere, to teach. A doctorate can be interpreted as suggesting that the successful candidate has something to teach (i.e. something new, something worth passing on). Such a person teaches particular audiences in particular contexts. They conclude that a doctorate should be sufficiently speculative or original to command respectful peer attention.

References

Anderson, G. L. and Heer, K. (1999) The New Paradigm Wars: Is there room for rigorous practitioner knowledge in schools and universities. *Educational Researcher* **40** (June-July): 12-21.

Winter, R, Griffiths, M and Green, K., (2000) The 'academic' qualities of practice: What are the criteria for a practice based PhD? *Studies in Higher Education*, March.

For further information, please contact the Office for Postgraduate Research on 613 9919 5014 or email Natalie Sciberras, Postgraduate Research Coordinator – Natalie.Sciberras@vu.edu.au