

WESTERN SYDNEY  
UNIVERSITY



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Graduate Research School



# Higher Degree Research

GUIDELINES FOR EXAMINERS 2020

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# GUIDELINES FOR EXAMINERS

## INTRODUCTION

Thank you for agreeing to act as an examiner for one of our higher degree research (HDR) candidates.

We appreciate the contribution of external examiners in maintaining our standards of excellence in research training.

Western Sydney University allows theses to be presented in different formats. Examinable work may include a thesis, exegesis, overarching statement, dissertation, portfolio, or a combination of these formats.

The Graduate Research School provides these guidelines to assist examiners of higher degree research submissions for the awards:

- Master of Philosophy (MPhil)
- Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
- Doctor of Creative Arts (DCA)
- Doctor of Cultural Research (DCR)
- Doctor of Education (EdD)

These guidelines explain what is expected of the candidate and your contribution in assessing their work and presenting your findings.

Please read these guidelines carefully and if you have any further questions, contact the Graduate Research School via email:

[grs.exams@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:grs.exams@westernsydney.edu.au)

During every graduation ceremony, Western Sydney University HDR candidates hold pride of place. Their journey is always one of trials, exhilaration and deep learning. Your valuable input makes this journey possible.

Once again, thank you for the generosity in examining the work of our candidates.

Best regards,

**Professor Caroline Smith**

Dean, Graduate Studies (Policy and Innovation)



# EXAMINATION PROCEDURES

## COMMUNICATION DURING THE EXAMINATION PROCESS

Please conduct all communication about the examination process through the Graduate Research School HDR Examinations Team:

[grs.exams@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:grs.exams@westernsydney.edu.au)

For academic advice about completing an examination, please contact HDR Examinations Team and they will direct your enquiry to the most appropriate person:

[grs.exams@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:grs.exams@westernsydney.edu.au)

You must not contact the student under examination or their supervisors at any stage during the process.

## TIMEFRAME OF EXAMINATION

We are always mindful that candidates are eagerly awaiting their results, so we encourage examiners to respond as soon as possible.

As such, we request that you please read the thesis and return your full examiner's report to the Graduate Research School within six (6) weeks of receipt of the work. The requested due date is indicated on the covering letter that accompanies these guidelines.

If you are unable to complete the report by the due date, please contact the Graduate Research School as soon as possible as it may be possible to grant you an extension of time.

If you are unable to complete the report, an alternative examiner will be appointed. Please notify the Graduate Research School as soon as possible to minimise disruption to the candidate.

## ELECTRONIC THESES

Candidates at Western Sydney University submit their thesis electronically as a PDF document.

If you have requested to receive a hardcopy thesis, you are required to return the copy of the thesis to the Graduate Research School with your examiner's report.

At the conclusion of the examination and when all conditions have been met and the degree awarded, an electronic copy of the thesis will be lodged with Western Sydney University Library for the use of the wider research community.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

It is essential to preserve the confidentiality of the examiners and examiners' reports during the examination process.

It is the policy of Western Sydney University that at the conclusion of the examination process the candidate will be given a copy of each examiner's report.

If you wish that your identity remains confidential, you should indicate this at the bottom of the Examiner's Report Coversheet. If you request confidentiality, the report will be given to the candidate and your name will be withheld.

## HONORARIUM

You will be awarded an honorarium for the examination of the thesis. The amount will be that currently recommended by Universities Australia as follows:

- Research Masters: AU \$268.00
- Doctorates: AU \$477.00

The honorarium will be remitted following the completion of the examination process.

If you are an Australian taxpayer, you will need to also provide the following:

- 1.** An invoice or claim for payment if you do not hold an ABN (complete and return the form provided).
- 2.** An invoice if you hold an ABN and are not registered to collect GST.
- 3.** A tax invoice if you hold an ABN and are registered to collect GST (you will need to add 10% GST to the honorarium).

If you are unable to quote an ABN, PAYG tax will be deducted at the maximum rate as prescribed by law.

If you are not an Australian taxpayer, you will need to provide the following:

- 1.** An invoice or claim for payment (complete the template provided).
- 2.** A Statement by a Supplier form (complete the form provided).

Alternatively, you can choose to waive your fee and Western Sydney University will direct it instead to our Student Welfare Fund to support the journey of future HDR candidates.

# EXAMINER'S REPORT

You are required to return an examiner's report that includes two components:

1. The completed Examiner's Report Cover Sheet, on which you nominate an overall outcome (included); and,
2. A written report of a minimum two (2) pages.

## WRITTEN REPORT

Your examination report must be sufficiently detailed and comprehensive to:

- Provide an explanation of your overall recommendation on the outcome of the examination; and,
- Assist the candidate to bring the thesis to the highest possible standard for the degree. The information you provide should help them in their pursuit of future research, publications, and career.

A report shorter than two pages is unlikely to serve these purposes. The report should discuss both the strengths and the weaknesses of the thesis, with detailed examples provided where possible.

Your summary recommendations should provide guidance on what needs to be done rather than a grade or rating for the thesis.

Please remember: Research degrees are pass/fail. Any changes to be made will bring the work to pass level.

If you feel it is warranted, you may submit a confidential addendum to Western Sydney University:  
[grs.exams@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:grs.exams@westernsydney.edu.au)

Where changes should be made to the examinable work before it is regarded as an acceptable standard for the award of the degree, examiners are asked to specify whether the changes are of a mandatory or recommended nature.

The final outcome for the candidate will be determined by an assessment of the examiners' reports, with additional comments provided by the supervisory panel.

All recommendations from the examiners are given critical consideration.

Examiners are asked to include all substantial recommendations, feedback and advice about the direction of the thesis in the examiner's report. Avoid referring to notes that you have made directly on the thesis and instead include these directly in the report.

You may provide additional feedback by directly making notes on the electronic thesis document, but please be aware that these are only made available to the candidate and may not be reviewed by the supervisory panel.

If you recommend that changes be made, it would be helpful if you could provide an estimate of how long it will take the candidate to complete the changes.

## RECOMMENDATION

You are required to make one of the following recommendations using the Examiner's Report Cover Sheet.

**Outcome A:** That the degree be awarded.

You may recommend this category for a thesis that satisfies all the requirements for the degree.

**Outcome M:** That the candidate be required to undertake minor rewriting of an editorial nature (to be approved by the relevant Research and Higher Degrees Committee) before the degree is awarded.

This category should be used for a thesis that contains only unimportant errors of a typographical or similar nature.

It is estimated that this should take the candidate no more than two (2) weeks to complete.

**Outcome R:** That the candidate be required to undertake rewriting that is of greater magnitude than minor editorial changes. The revised changes need to meet the satisfaction of the University Research Studies Committee before the degree is awarded.

You should specify this category for a thesis that requires major amendments, the insertion of additional information or the significant re-writing of section(s) of the thesis.

This would require the student to complete more than two (2) weeks of re-writing.

**Outcome X:** That the candidate be required to revise and resubmit the thesis for further examination within a specified time.

You may specify this category for a thesis that requires major amendments and re-submission of the thesis for further examination. The candidate will be required to conduct further work, revise the text and re-submit the thesis for examination.

This category is to be used when the thesis shows some merit that may, with a moderate amount of work, be sufficiently improved for re-submission. The examiner, in the written report, should give clear guidelines as to the deficiencies in the work as it has been represented in the thesis. Your comments will help formulate the basis for the revisions and ensuing re-examination.

A thesis that has undergone major revision after previous examination may not be recommended for this option a second time.

The revised thesis should be examined by the original examiners. When the revisions undertaken by the candidate are almost complete, we will contact you again to ask if you are prepared to undertake the re-examination. If you are not available, a new examiner will be appointed by the relevant research committee.

**Outcome F:** That the degree not be awarded.

You should not recommend this category for a thesis when a limited to moderate amount of additional work or modification could raise the thesis to an acceptable standard. This category is to be used when it is clear that the candidate has demonstrated that they have not presented sufficient evidence to warrant the award of the degree. The examiner is requested to detail fully the reasons for this recommendation.

## AVAILABILITY OF EXAMINERS' REPORTS

Examiners' reports are made available to the candidate after their supervisory panel and the relevant Research and Higher Degrees Committee has reviewed the recommendations. While we encourage critical engagement, we also remind examiners of the stressful position candidates find themselves in and request the use of respectful and constructive language.

# EXAMINATION OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (PHD) THESIS

## BACKGROUND TO THE PHD

The Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) is awarded in recognition of original, independent and successful research of international standard in the discipline. A PhD candidate should make a substantial original contribution to knowledge in the form of new knowledge or significant and original adaptation, application and interpretation of existing new knowledge.

The period of candidature for the PhD is three (3) to four (4) years full-time, or the part-time equivalent. There is no fixed word limit, however, most disciplines have an expectation of approximately 80,000 words, with 100,000 words considered an upper limit.

The thesis may be based on a comprehensive critical review of literature, empirical research, creative work or other systematic approach embedded in a field or discipline, and/or they may be based on advanced and sustained critical reflection and analysis of professional theory and practice. It may include papers published by the candidate as first author during their candidature. For any published papers where the candidate is a co-author, the candidate must clearly identify their contribution and the contribution of the co-authors. The thesis may consist of a single written work or a combination of a written work and other media (exhibition, performance, novel, film, video, computer program, etc.).

## BASIS OF PHD THESIS EXAMINATION

In assessing the work, you are asked to determine if:

- The thesis as a whole makes an original contribution to the knowledge of the subject with which it deals;
- The thesis provides a sufficiently comprehensive study of the topic appropriate to the degree in the discipline area, or in related interdisciplinary areas;
- The methods adopted are appropriate to the subject matter and are appropriately applied;
- The research findings are suitably set out, accompanied by adequate exposition and are discussed critically in the context of the discipline; and,
- The quality of English expression and general presentation has been completed to a high standard.

# EXAMINATION OF PHD THESIS AS A SERIES OF PAPERS

## BACKGROUND TO THE DEGREE

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) candidates may submit a series of publications as their examinable work. The work must be completed during the period of enrolment.

The candidate will normally be the first author for any included published papers. For any published papers where the candidate is a co-author, the candidate must clearly identify their contribution and the contribution of the co-authors.

Requirements for submission of a thesis as a series of papers are:

### a. Overarching statement

The overarching statement serves as an introduction to the assessable work. It makes reference to the scholarly papers and contextualises the research undertaken within the discipline(s). The overarching statement will demonstrate the contemporary relevance of each publication and make clear the way in which the publications make an original, scholarly contribution to knowledge. It will provide a thematic overview which converts the individual publications into an integrated work. Statements are provided for each publication about the contribution to authorship and the role of any co-authors.

### b. Four scholarly research papers/chapters

A minimum of two out of four papers or chapters must be published. The additional papers or chapters must be accepted but do not need to be published at the time of examination. Evidence of acceptance must be provided.

### c. Quality of papers/chapters

Each paper or chapter will have a designated scholarly outlet in a refereed, high profile journal, or in an edited academic volume. A statement about the journal impact factor, or other measure of the quality of the publication will be provided to the examiner. In exceptional circumstances, Western Sydney University may accept less than four papers or chapter for examination. This occurs if the relevant research committee finds that the work makes a relevant original contribution to the literature.

## BASIS OF EXAMINATION

You are asked to make an overall judgement about the scope and quality of the work contained within the portfolio and to indicate the extent to which its cumulative nature warrants the award of the degree.

Your assessment should determine if:

- the thesis as a whole makes an original contribution to the knowledge of the research area;
- the thesis provides a sufficiently comprehensive study of the topic appropriate to the degree in the discipline area, or in related interdisciplinary areas;
- the methods adopted are appropriate to the subject matter and are appropriately applied;
- the research findings are suitably set out, accompanied by adequate exposition and are discussed critically in the context of the discipline; and
- the quality of English and general presentation has been completed to a high standard.

# EXAMINATION OF PHD BY PUBLICATION

## BACKGROUND TO THE DEGREE

The Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) by Publication enables the award of a doctoral level degree to candidates on the basis of their original scholarship and contribution to knowledge. It provides formal recognition of established researchers with a solid reputation and standing based on their record of academic publication and for whom enrolment in a standard PhD or Professional Doctorate would be inappropriate. The degree is awarded on the basis of contribution to knowledge and a demonstrated capacity of independent research.

Candidates undertaking this degree are recognised researchers with an established record of peer-reviewed publications. Candidates may not have been enrolled in a PhD or a Professional Doctorate within the previous five years.

## EXAMINABLE PORTFOLIO FOR PHD BY PUBLICATION

The examinable portfolio will comprise:

- a. An overarching statement; and,
- b. A collection of originally authored published works.

The overarching statement will:

- demonstrate the contemporary relevance of each publication;
- make clear the way in which the publications make an original, scholarly contribution to knowledge at doctoral level;
- provide a thematic overview which converts the individual publications into an integrated work;
- make clear the author's contribution to all jointly authored publications;
- list the publications being presented for examination in chronological order;
- indicate the way in which the author's work has developed; and,
- be the author's own account of the work undertaken.

The collection may include:

- books and monographs;
- chapters in books;
- scholarly articles in peer-reviewed research journals; and/or,
- work in media other than text such as exhibition, performance, novel, film, video, computer program, etc.

The submission will not include unpublished work, review articles, newspaper articles, articles in non-refereed professional journals, work that has already been submitted successfully or unsuccessfully for a degree at any university or works where the author's role was that of an editor.

## BASIS OF EXAMINATION OF PHD BY PUBLICATION

Examiners will be asked to assess the work to determine if:

- The portfolio as a whole makes an original contribution to the knowledge of the subject with which it deals;
- The portfolio provides a sufficiently comprehensive study of the topic appropriate to the degree in the discipline area, or in related interdisciplinary areas;
- The methods adopted are appropriate to the subject matter and are appropriately applied;
- The research findings are suitably set out, accompanied by adequate exposition and are discussed critically in the context of the discipline; and,
- The quality of English expression and general presentation has been completed to a high standard.

You are also asked to comment on the quality of the journal or book in which the papers are published.

# EXAMINATION OF MASTERS (HONOURS) / MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY (MPHIL)

## BACKGROUND TO THE DEGREE

The Master of Philosophy (MPhil) degree is aimed at the research skills development of the candidate, with particular emphasis on research methodology appropriate to the field of study. It is intended to provide candidates with the opportunity to develop their potential for research, enhance their skills in problem identification and specification, and their ability to develop and present solutions.

The period of candidature for the MPhil is one (1) to two (2) years full-time, or the part-time equivalent. There is no fixed word limit, however, most disciplines have an expectation of approximately 40,000 words, with 80,000 words considered an upper limit.

The thesis may consist of a single written work or a combination of a written work and other media (publication, exhibition, performance, novel, film, video, computer program, etc.).

## BASIS OF EXAMINATION

In assessing the work, you are asked to determine if:

- The thesis as a whole makes a contribution to the knowledge of the subject with which it deals at research masters level. It is not expected that originality will be at the level of a doctorate;
- The thesis provides a sufficiently comprehensive study of the topic appropriate to the degree in the discipline area, or in related interdisciplinary areas;
- The methods adopted are appropriate to the subject matter and are appropriately applied;
- The research findings are suitably set out, accompanied by adequate exposition and are discussed critically in the context of the discipline; and,
- The quality of English expression and general presentation has been completed to a high standard.

# EXAMINATION OF DOCTOR OF CREATIVE ARTS (DCA) / PRACTICED-BASED THESIS

## BACKGROUND TO THE DEGREE

The Doctor of Creative Arts (DCA) aims to provide professional artists with recognition of both their practice and the contribution they make to professional and scholarly knowledge. The DCA candidate develops knowledge through practice, undertaking the development of a body of original creative work within the chosen discipline. It is a program of advanced research embedded in the artist's professional practice and aims to develop graduates who are:

- Technical and conceptual innovators in their arts discipline;
- Committed to research and development as a means of solving problems;
- Familiar with new technology and its applications;
- Knowledgeable in theoretical foundations and demonstrate highly developed skills in the application of theory to practice and creative reflection;
- Effective and advanced communicators at all levels;
- Able to articulate a broad vision of practice and practice-led research and its relationship to social, cultural and community needs; and,
- Able to contribute to the advancement of policy and practice in the creative arts.

The period of candidature for the DCA is three (3) to four (4) years full-time, or the part-time equivalent. There is no fixed word limit, however, most disciplines have an expectation of an exegesis of approximately 30,000 words.

## ASSESSABLE WORK

A candidate presenting a body of creative work is required to present the exegesis concurrently. However, where the body of creative work is a public performance or exhibition the candidate is required to submit the exegesis no later than three (3) months after the final event. This implies that careful planning is required to ensure that the DCA submission is made within the time specified for candidature.

The submitted thesis should show evidence of significant conceptual development, as demonstrated in an exhibition, performance, writing, screening or publication during the period of candidature.

Examiners are allowed to comment on both the critical component and the exegesis.

Examiners are allowed to comment on both the critical component and the exegesis. Examination will incorporate the creative component, but examiner's recommendations for any additional work described in examination outcome options M, R or X can apply to creative component and/or the critical exegesis.

# EXAMINATION OF DOCTOR OF CULTURAL RESEARCH (DCR)

## BACKGROUND TO THE DEGREE

The Doctor of Cultural Research (DCR) provides extended and advanced training in professional fields where projects and investigations are more applied in nature and more obviously oriented to professional practice. All DCR candidates are required to produce an examinable portfolio of work comprising an overarching statement and evidence of up to six components of sustained scholarly activity. The portfolio should give evidence of significant conceptual development. It should also demonstrate the professional capacity of the candidate through their ability to focus academic work of a high level of competence with practical relevance leading to the better understanding of significant problems in practice.

The period of candidature for the DCR is three (3) to four (4) years full-time, or the part-time equivalent.

## COMPOSITION OF THE EXAMINABLE PORTFOLIO OVERARCHING STATEMENT

The overarching statement serves as an introduction to the portfolio. It makes reference to the research events and explains the research components in terms of their temporal sequence and interdependence, and their contribution to the candidate's personal and professional development, and to the field of scholarship. The overarching statement will be approximately 10,000 words.

## EVIDENCE OF SUSTAINED SCHOLARLY ACTIVITY

This section involves up to six components of research and output within defined focus areas, conducted during the period of enrolment, as outlined below:

- Up to three projects, each generating a report of approximately 10,000 words, for a total word count of approximately 30,000 words. (Note: it is possible for the candidate to only undertake one project and produce one report, which would need to be approximately 30,000 words).

- A required three peer-reviewed, or prepared for peer review, articles or academic outputs (or equivalent, including newer publication formats to be agreed upon), each of approximately 8,000 words.

If more than one project is undertaken, the first project might involve foundation work in contemporary issues and theoretical literature of relevance to the candidate's work environment, with an emphasis on broad, critical perspectives. At this stage, the candidate engages in library research, writing reviews or analysis or conducting surveys of current practice. Later projects will be particular studies, mainly generated from the candidate's workplace, addressing specific problems or issues in that context. There may be overlap between the topics for different projects, given that they will all come from a common field of interest, but the resulting reports should bring out the differences in emphasis and conclusions. As a totality these topics should be sufficiently complementary, so that the total research endeavour is a cumulative one, though in some circumstances, where the evidence dictates, some later conclusions may challenge ones from an earlier stage.

There is a general expectation of the portfolio being a minimum of approximately 60,000 words.

## ASSESSABLE WORK

The examiners are asked to make a global judgement about the scope and quality of the work contained within the portfolio and to indicate the extent to which its cumulative nature warrants the award of the degree. The work should meet the usual criteria required of higher degree research, that is, it must represent a substantial original contribution to knowledge in the subject area and provide evidence of originality through the discovery of new facts or the exercising of independent critical ability or the application of knowledge in new contexts.

# EXAMINATION OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION (EDD) THESIS

## BACKGROUND TO THE DEGREE

The Doctor of Education (EdD) provides advanced research training in a professional field where projects and investigations are applied in nature and explicitly oriented to professional practice. The EdD equips candidates to be critical consumers and generators of practice-led research and research-led practice, emphasising engagement with the relationship between research, scholarship and professional practice.

There are various areas of study available under the EdD including:

- Policy studies in education;
- Curriculum studies;
- Learning and teaching;
- Socio-cultural studies; and,
- Educational leadership and change.

The EdD portfolio requires candidates to produce an examinable portfolio of work accomplished during their candidature. The portfolio comprises of four components (including three substantive components and an evidence-based narrative). Each component must include evidence and a scholarly paper.

The EdD program requires students to

- Attend and actively participate in a specific number of on-campus events, seminars, workshops, conferences and visits;
- Present at approved conferences; and,
- Compile a portfolio that demonstrates evidence of research scholarship at a doctoral standard.

The period of candidature for the EdD is three (3) to four (4) years full-time, or the part-time equivalent.

## ASSESSABLE WORK

The examinable portfolio will be a written work, but allows for the inclusion of other communication mediums such as film, video or online resources.

The examiners are asked to make an overall judgement about the scope and quality of the work contained within the portfolio and to indicate the extent to which its cumulative nature warrants a doctoral degree. The work should meet the usual criteria required of doctoral research, that is, it must represent a substantial original contribution to knowledge in the subject area and provide evidence of originality through the discovery of new facts or the exercising of independent critical ability or the application of knowledge in new contexts.

Research output includes:

- three (3) substantive research components (comprising 15,000 to 25,000 words each) that reflect the structure of the degree and/or research engagement with professional practice; and,
- an evidence-based narrative (10,000 to 15,000 words) of personal, professional and scholarly development.

Each of the three substantive research components will focus on a specific aspect of the candidate's professional practice and reflect engagement with relevant theory, literature and research. These components may address different and discrete work-related activities or be aspects of sequential and ongoing professional pursuits.

Each component will comprise two parts:

- Evidence of the development of professional work-place related practices or products that are based on research and/or scholarship, intellectually rigorous and provide evidence of critical thinking to identify the research niche. This might include: evaluation of an existing, or implementation of a new, practice or program; or the production of a report, video, curriculum, strategic plan, or website. Where these practices or products are not text-based, they will be supported by a written exegesis (10,000 - 15,000 words). Each of the three professional work-place related and research-based practices or products will be developed for a clearly articulated purpose and for a specific audience.

- A scholarly paper intended for public dissemination that contextualises the first component within the relevant literature, empirical research, theory and policy as appropriate to the candidate's research (7,000 - 10,000 words). Each of the three scholarly papers will have undergone a process of development with peers and supervisors.

The narrative of personal, professional and scholarly development serves as both an introduction to the portfolio and as research-based evidence of the contribution and impact of the candidate's work on professional practice in the field. The narrative will:

- Make reference to the three substantive components involving scholarly engagement with professional practice; and,
- Describe and reflect on these components in terms of: their temporal sequence and interdependence; their engagement with specific theories, research methods and/or bodies of scholarship and literature; their contribution to the candidate's personal, professional and scholarly development; and their contribution to the candidate's work context and their profession.

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