



**AUSTRALIS
BUSINESS
SCHOOL**

Higher Degree Research (HDR) Assessment and Examination Policy and Procedure

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1. PURPOSE

This policy outlines the responsibilities and processes for the assessment and examination of Higher Degree by Research (HDR) candidates at Australis. It ensures a fair and rigorous examination process in line with Australis' academic standards, the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021*, and the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*. This policy should be read in conjunction with Australis' HDR policies and guidelines on academic and research integrity.

2. SCOPE

This policy and procedure applies to the assessment and examination of research outputs, including theses, submitted by HDR candidates at Australis. It covers the requirements for coursework and research components, ensuring they meet the academic governance and quality assurance standards of Australis, including collaboration with external examiners and third-party partnerships.

3. DEFINITIONS

See the Australis *Glossary of Terms* for definitions.

4. POLICY STATEMENT

4.1. Commitment to Research Excellence

Australis is committed to ensuring that HDR theses meet the highest standards of academic quality, integrity, and research excellence. In line with the *Threshold Standards 2021*, Australis ensures that research conducted by HDR candidates contributes to the creation of new knowledge, or the use of existing knowledge in innovative ways.

The examination and assessment processes reflect Australis' dedication to fostering academic freedom, safeguarding research integrity, and maintaining a rigorous and transparent research environment.

4.2. Policy Principles

Australis' HDR assessment and examination process is governed by the following principles:

- a. HDR theses must meet the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Level 9 criteria, demonstrating an original contribution to knowledge and adhering to the standards set

by the *Threshold Standards 2021*. This includes ensuring that research is planned, purposive, and contributes new concepts or understandings.

- b. All HDR research must adhere to the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*, upholding the highest standards of research integrity, avoiding misconduct such as fabrication, falsification, and plagiarism. Candidates must comply with Australis' policies on intellectual property and human research ethics.
- c. The award of a higher degree is subject to an independent assessment of the thesis by qualified external examiners, ensuring that the thesis undergoes external, independent scrutiny. Examiner selection must align with TEQSA's expectations for a rigorous and objective examination process.
- d. Australis provides robust supervision arrangements and regularly monitors candidates' academic progress to ensure timely and meaningful feedback. This aligns with TEQSA's guidance on maintaining an effective research training environment that supports candidate development.
- e. Australis provides transparent guidelines for the format, presentation, and examination of HDR theses. These expectations are clearly communicated to all candidates, supervisors, examiners, and administrators, ensuring consistency and fairness throughout the assessment process.
- f. When research is conducted in collaboration with external parties, Australis ensures that all partners adhere to Australis' ethical standards and maintain research integrity throughout the project. Australis follows TEQSA's guidelines for third-party involvement in research training to ensure compliance and uphold quality.
- g. Australis ensures appropriate engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in research projects, respecting cultural knowledge and ensuring community welfare.

5. POLICY DETAILS

5.1. The Thesis

A thesis submitted by HDR candidates must adhere to the following guidelines:

- a. Candidates are required to consult with their Student Supervisory Panel regarding thesis style, formatting, and referencing conventions applicable to their discipline before beginning the writing process.
- b. A Master of Business Research thesis must be written in English and include a referencing system appropriate to the candidate's discipline area.
- c. The thesis must not contain material that has been accepted for any other research qualification at Australis or any other institution. Previously published material or content authored by any person (including the candidate) can only be included if due reference is provided and appropriate copyright arrangements are made. A Master of Business

Research thesis is typically a text-based thesis of no more than 30,000 words that reports on original scholarship and research conducted under supervision.

- d. The word count of the thesis excludes appendices and references.
- e. Candidates must follow Australis' guidelines on the ethical use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) tools in thesis preparation (see *Guidelines for Responsible and Ethical Use of AI*).
- f. Candidates must submit a PDF copy of their thesis for examination. Examiners may also request a Word copy to facilitate the use of track changes for feedback. In such cases, candidates are required to provide the Word copy upon request.
- g. The thesis must meet the above requirements unless otherwise agreed upon by the Higher Degree Research Committee (HDRC).

5.2. Examination of Theses

The examination of HDR theses at Australis is based on the following:

- a. Examiners must provide a declaration of independence (that they have not been involved in the research) and real or perceived conflicts of interest (professional, personal, or commercial) with the candidate, their supervisors, or Australis. Professional and personal relationships between examiners, candidates and their supervisors may introduce bias, compromising the examination's independence. Examiners must not have collaborated on a joint research project or publication with the supervisors within the last five years. The Higher Degree Research Committee (HDRC) will assess and determine whether any declared conflicts of interest result in ineligibility to serve as an examiner.
- b. The examination process must be transparent, ensuring clear communication to all stakeholders involved, including candidates, supervisors, and examiners. Candidates must be informed of the examination's progress and any unavoidable delays.
- c. Examiners will receive appropriate guidance (refer to *HDR Examinations Guidelines*).
- d. The examination process must ensure timely outcomes, with clear timelines communicated to examiners and candidates.
- e. Explicit and accessible criteria for examination, as well as categories of possible outcomes, will be provided to examiners to ensure consistency and fairness in the evaluation process.
- f. Processes for managing divergent examination outcomes are clearly outlined. Candidates are provided with an opportunity to appeal examination results if necessary, the Board of Directors (BoD), upon advice from the Academic Board (AB) and based on examination results and examiner feedback, determines the conferral of research degrees. Conferral of the degree certifies that the candidate has met the AQF and Australis' requirements for the award.

5.3. Examiners

Approximately six weeks prior to the expected thesis submission date, the Principal Supervisor, in consultation with the SSP, is responsible for recommending four potential

examiners for approval by the Course Co-ordinator and endorsement by the HDR Director. The nomination process includes the following steps:

1. Recommendation of Examiners form (appendix 1) is to be submitted by the Principal Supervisor for approval to the Course Co-ordinator and for endorsement by the HDR Director who reports to the Higher Degree Research Committee (HDRC) at the next scheduled HDRC meeting for noting and approval (or approval by circular resolution).
2. Once the examiners list has been approved, it is expected that the external examiners will be contacted by the HDR Director as to their availability in order of preference as indicated and justified in the Recommendation of Examiners Form (appendix 1).
3. Theses submitted for the MBRes course must have two examiners, with the following stipulations:
 - a. Ordinarily it is expected that both examiners, will be external to the State with no formal affiliation (e.g., staff, adjunct, or having close ties) to Australis. Exceptions to this rule may be considered by the HDRC who will recommend an exemption to Academic Board for approval.
 - b. Both examiners will be of international standing in the Broad Field of Education (BFoE) code 08 Management and Commerce.
 - c. At least one of the two examiners will demonstrate prior experience of HDR examination at either AQF level 9 or 10.
 - d. A determination of international standing will be justified from the information provided on the Recommendation of Examiners Form (appendix 1) based on a brief CV of the proposed examiner with reference to a range of criteria including:
 - i. A track record of publishing in top quality (Q1) journals as defined by the Australian Business Deans Council (or equivalent e.g., Academic Journal Guide of the Association of Business Schools (UK));
 - ii. A track record of published monographs with Tier 1 publishing houses.
 - iii. Presence at refereed international conferences of standing in the field (e.g., Academy of Management)
 - iv. A track record of Thesis examination at the level of the current degree (or Higher)
 - e. Both examiners must be independent, which means that they have not been involved in the research.
 - f. It is normally expected that at least one examiner will be employed at an international higher education institution awarding an equivalent qualification and ranked in the top 500 Universities globally by a reputable ranking system (e.g., THE, QS, ARWU).
In addition the following stipulations will apply:
 - i. A person who has supervised the submitting student for a higher degree program at this or another institution must not be appointed as an examiner for that student's thesis.
 - ii. A person who has previously published with, worked with, or been involved in a professional or non-professional capacity with the submitting student cannot be an examiner.
4. In the event that an approved examiner is unavailable or unresponsive in accepting the thesis for examination after two weeks, a reserve examiner, in order of preference from

the original list will be substituted by the HDR Director (in consultation with the SSP and approved via circular resolution by the HDRC) to maintain as closely as possible the timeline for examination.

5. Australis, via the HDR Director with HDRC approval, reserves the right to appoint a reserve examiner during the examination process meeting the above criteria as a third examiner for the following purposes:
 - a. Ensuring the examination panel has appropriate depth and breadth of examination reports relevant to the thesis topic.
 - b. Moderating examination results when reports from the first two examiners significantly differ (i.e., greater than one grade).
In cases where a third examiner is required, he or she will be introduced to the process before the initial examination outcome is communicated to the candidate.
6. The nominations and appointment of examiners are to be conducted in confidence. The following guidelines apply:
 - a. Candidates and Principal Supervisors may provide a list of examiners deemed unsuitable due to co-authorship or other professional relationships.
 - b. Beyond this, candidates should have no role in the nomination or selection of examiners. If the candidate or Supervisors are found to have influenced or contacted the examiners during the examination process, the examiners may be stood down by the HDRC and the examiner selection process recommenced.

6. PROCEDURES

6.1. Thesis Requirements for Master of Business Research

- a. HDR candidates, supervisors, examiners, and administrators must have access to clear information regarding:
 - i. Thesis format and presentation expectations (refer to the APA Style Manual).
 - ii. The HDR examination processes and requirements.
- b. A thesis presented for a Master of Business Research degree must meet AQF Level 9 requirements, demonstrating that the candidate has:
 - i. Successfully completed supervised study.
 - ii. Undertaken and completed a course of research, research training, and independent study.
 - iii. Applied the body of knowledge appropriate to the in context and research question addressed by the thesis.
 - iv. Made a contribution to knowledge (theory or practice), demonstrating a critical appreciation and understanding of the relationship of their work to that of another research in the field.
- c. Candidates must be aware of the following examples of research misconduct and declare that there has been no:
 - i. Fabrication of Data: Claiming results where none have been obtained.
 - ii. Falsification of Data: Altering or changing data records.

- iii. Plagiarism: Including self-plagiarism (reusing one's previous work without proper citation).
 - iv. Misleading or False Attribution of Authorship: Claiming authorship for work not substantially contributed to or failing to acknowledge all contributors.
 - v. Failure to Comply with Ethical Standards: Breaching institutional policy or procedural requirements for research, such as non-compliance with human or animal research ethics guidelines.
- d. On the recommendation of the supervisory panel, candidates may consider employing professional proof-reading services before thesis submission. Approval from the Principal Supervisor is required after the final draft prior to submission has been seen. This copy will be held by the supervisor as a reference document., Candidates should follow the Australian Council of Graduate Research guidelines for proof-reading services. Proofreaders may be used for the purposes of correcting expression and style and must not make a contribution to content.

6.2. Thesis Submission Process

- a. Candidates must submit a completed Intention to Submit form to the HDR Director at least 6 weeks prior to the intended thesis submission date, ensuring timely processing and examiner nomination.
- b. In order to encourage speedy identification of willing examiners and timely thesis examination Potential examiners will be sent a 250-300 word summary of the thesis during the interim period between permission to submit by the SSP and actual submission. The summary will be written by the student (but sent by the HDR Director), by way of informing them of the subject matter and encouraging them to agree to examine on behalf of Australis.
- c. Prior to the accepting final submission of the thesis for examination students will demonstrate their mastery of their chosen topic and their ability to communicate their research to an intelligent audience by delivering a presentation. The audience for the presentation is usually the Student's Supervisory Panel (SSP) although others such as field supervisors/host organisation may be invited. Satisfying the Student Supervisory Panel that the candidate has an appropriate level of understanding of his or her topic and the content of the written thesis will be important in determining whether or not to allow the written form to be subjected to examination.
- d. The thesis must be submitted in PDF format unless prior approval is obtained from the HDRC for submission in another format.
- e. All thesis submissions must include acknowledgements where applicable, including:
 - i. Financial support (including Australian Government assistance).
 - ii. Industry engagement or access to external facilities for research.
 - iii. Contributions from professional editing or proof-reading services.
 - iv. Contributions made by individuals to the thesis or research project.
- f. All thesis submissions must include:

- i. A signed declaration of originality and authorship, confirming that the work is the candidate's own.
 - ii. A copyright statement, ensuring compliance with intellectual property laws.
 - iii. A table of contents, a list of references, and any necessary appendices relevant to the research.
- g. Non-print materials, such as multimedia files that are integral to the thesis, must be submitted according to the guidelines provided by the Australis library or other relevant institutional authorities.

6.3. Thesis Review Examination Process

Examiners will:

- a. be provided with the thesis for examination by the HDR Director within two working days of the thesis being approved by the HDRC for examination.
- b. be provided with an Examiner's Guide outlining the expectations, criteria, and process for evaluating the thesis (refer to *HDR Examination Guidelines*).
- c. evaluate the thesis based on the quality of research, contribution to knowledge, originality, and adherence to the AQF Level 9 requirements.
- d. within six to eight weeks, unless otherwise agreed with the HDR Director, submit their reports and recommendations to the HDR Director who will appraise the HDRC of examination reports (by formal meeting or circulation as appropriate) as they are completed.

6.4. Examination Outcomes

- a. Examiners may recommend one of the following outcomes:
 - i. Pass without revisions
 - ii. Pass with minor revisions (to be completed to the satisfaction of the supervisor)
 - iii. Pass with major revisions (requiring re-examination)
 - iv. Defer for substantial revision (requiring re-submission and re-examination)
 - v. Fail
- b. In cases where examiner reports differ significantly (i.e., divergent reports of greater than one grade), the HDRC may either appoint a third examiner to resolve the disparity or moderate the final decision through consultation with the existing examiners.

6.5. Post-Examination Process

Depending on the outcome of the examination process:

- a. Candidates must complete all revisions recommended by the examiners within the timeframe specified by the HDRC
- b. The HDRC will monitor the revision process to ensure that the revised thesis meets the required academic and research standards before granting final approval.

- c. Once all required revisions have been completed and approved, the thesis will be submitted to the HDRC for final endorsement of the degree conferral.

6.6. Revisions and Resubmission

- a. If a student is required to revise and resubmit their thesis, they must follow the timeframes set by the examiners:
 - i. Pass with minor revisions – 1 month.
 - ii. Pass with major revisions – 2 months.
 - iii. Revise and resubmit for examination – 3 months.
- b. HDR students must remain enrolled during the revision period and pay any applicable tuition fees. International HDR students who have returned home will pay offshore or international fees as applicable.
- c. A student failing to meet the resubmission deadline will be awarded a 'Fail'.
- d. HDR students required to 'Revise and Resubmit for Examination' have one opportunity to ensure their thesis meets the standard for the award of the degree upon re-examination.
- e. Examiners of a revised and re-submitted thesis must provide a recommendation of 'Pass' (with or without amendments) or 'Fail.'
- f. If the examiners' recommendations of the re-submitted thesis diverge by more than one grade (e.g., one recommends 'Pass with minor revisions' while another suggests 'Revise and resubmit'), a third independent examiner (according to the criteria listed in section 5.3 of this document) will be appointed. The outcome will be determined by the majority recommendation.
- g. The third examiner can be selected from the original list of suggested examiners or, if necessary, a new examiner will be sought (using the same criteria as previously) by the HDR Director in consultation with the Principal Supervisor.
- h. With Principal Supervisor support HDR students may apply in writing for an extension of their individual revision period at least 10 working days before the due date.
- i. In the case of minor or major revisions of the thesis HDR students must include a list (with text) of the recommended changes made and/or explain any that have not been made.
- j. In some cases (e.g. where extensive revisions are required), the HDRC may request a second oral presentation or interview to confirm revisions are satisfactory and understood by the candidate. This process, if applicable, serves to moderate the outcome of the thesis revision and protect against the influence of outside agents (e.g. GenAI). See *Guidelines for Responsible and Ethical Use of AI* for further guidance.

6.7. Certification of the Award

HDR conferral will follow Australis' *Academic Documentation and Graduation Policy and Procedure*. Once the Academic Board (AB) approves the award of the Master of Business

Research, the Research Coordinator will notify the student in writing. The notification will include:

- a. Instructions on the degree conferral procedures.
- b. A copy of the examiners' reports.

6.8. Library Deposit

Once the AB approves the award of the Master of Business Research, the Research Coordinator will ensure that the thesis is stored in electronic form (PDF Format) in the Australis Library Repository and made available to the public. Under exceptional circumstances, such as confidentiality agreements or pending patent approvals, theses may not be made available for a restricted time period.

7. COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

HDR candidates have the right to raise concerns and appeal decisions related to their research training and examination outcomes.

In the first instance, any concerns or issues should be addressed directly with the Principal Supervisor. If a resolution cannot be reached, the matter should be escalated to the HDR Director who will refer any recommendation to the HDRC for approval.

If the issue remains unresolved, HDR candidates may submit a formal appeal in accordance with the *Australis Student Complaints and Appeals Policy and Procedure*.

Appeals regarding the examination outcome must be submitted in writing to the Higher Degree Research Committee (HDRC) within 20 working days of receiving the final examination outcome. Appeals may be based on grounds of procedural irregularity or an unaddressed conflict of interest.

8. MONITORING AND REVIEW

The Research and Ethics Committee (REC) will report at least annually to the Academic Board with respect to ethics applications and outcomes. Breaches will be investigated as per the terms of reference of the committee and the outcomes if any investigations and remedial actions investigations will be reported.

The operations of the Research and Ethics Committee itself will be subject to annual internal review in the first two years with an external review conducted every three years. The frequency of reviews thereafter will be determined by triennial reviews.

The Academic Board (AB) will review and monitor the HDR courses to ensure compliance with TEQSA's standards and Australis' research policies, including those related to

examination and assessment processes. Course performance (enrolments), student progress, success, employability and satisfaction with their experience (appeals and complaints) will be monitored annually with an external review of all aspects of the courses being undertaken in year three. The frequency of subsequent reviews will be determined by the first review but reviews every 5 years are expected to become the norm.

HDR courses will be regularly evaluated for quality assurance, ensuring that examination and assessment practices meet the relevant AQF level standards.

9. RELATED DOCUMENTS, EXTERNAL REFERENCES AND VERSION CONTROL

9.1. Related/Referenced documents

- Academic Documentation and Graduation Policy and Procedure
- Admission and Student Selection Policy and Procedure
- APA Style Manual (www.apastyle.apa.org)
- Code of Conduct
- Conflict of Interest Policy
- Guidelines for Responsible and Ethical Use of AI
- HDR Candidate Progress Procedure
- Higher Degree Research Committee (HDRC) Terms of Reference
- Higher Degree Research (HDR) Supervision Policy and Procedure
- HDR Examination Guidelines
- Records and Information Management Policy
- Responsible Conduct of Research Policy and Procedure
- Research and Ethics Committee (REC) Terms of Reference
- Student Complaints and Appeals Policy and Procedure
- Student Letter of Offer and Agreement

9.2. Related legislation and external references

- Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2018)
- Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)
- Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000
- Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021
- National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018
- National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (Revised 2023)
- TEQSA Guidance Note: Research and Research Training (Version 2.0, September 2022)
- Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) Act 2011

9.3. Version Control

Version	Date	Reviewed/approved by	Key notes/changes
1.5	6/11/25	AB	Approved at the AB 6/11/25 meeting

9.4. Document Review

To be reviewed at least every five (5) years from the date of final approval

Appendix 1: Recommendation of Examiners form

Section 1: Candidate Information

- **Name:** [Candidate's Full Name]
- **Student ID:** [Student ID]
- **Course Enrolled:** [e.g., Master of Business Research]
- **Principal Supervisor:** [Supervisor's Name]
- **Associate supervisor** (if applicable): [Associate Supervisor's Name]
- **Date form submitted:** [Date]

Section 2: Research Project Overview

- **Thesis Title:** [Title of the Research Project]
- **Research Area:** [e.g., Business, Commerce, etc.]
- **Research Methodology:** [e.g. Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed Methods, etc.]
- **Summary of Research:** (maximum 300 words):
[Provide an overview of the research.]

Section 3: Examiner Recommendations (in order of preference)

Examiner 1

- **Title and Name:**
- **Highest Earned Relevant Degree and Awarding Institution:**
- **Name:**
- **Institution:**
- **Position:**
- **Email Address:**
- **Examiner requests printed copy:**
- **Postal Address:**
- **Phone:**
- **Demonstration of International standing:**
- **Experience in HDR thesis supervision/examination:**
- **Relevant publications:**
- **Independence/Conflict of Interest:**
- **Comments/Justification:**

Examiner 2

- **Title and Name:**
- **Highest Earned Relevant Degree and Awarding Institution:**
- **Name:**
- **Institution:**
- **Position:**
- **Email Address:**
- **Examiner requests printed copy:**
- **Postal Address:**
- **Phone:**
- **Demonstration of International standing:**
- **Experience in HDR thesis supervision/examination:**
- **Relevant publications:**
- **Independence/Conflict of Interest:**
- **Comments/Justification:**

Examiner 3

- **Title and Name:**
- **Highest Earned Relevant Degree and Awarding Institution:**
- **Name:**
- **Institution:**
- **Position:**
- **Email Address:**
- **Examiner requests printed copy:**
- **Postal Address:**
- **Phone:**
- **Demonstration of International standing:**
- **Experience in HDR thesis supervision/examination:**
- **Relevant publications:**
- **Independence/Conflict of Interest:**
- **Comments/Justification:**

Reserve Examiner (if applicable)

- **Title and Name:**
- **Highest Earned Relevant Degree and Awarding Institution:**
- **Name:**
- **Institution:**
- **Position:**
- **Email Address:**
- **Examiner requests printed copy:**
- **Postal Address:**
- **Phone:**
- **Demonstration of International standing:**
- **Experience in HDR thesis supervision/examination:**
- **Relevant publications:**
- **Independence/Conflict of Interest:**
- **Comments/Justification:**

Instructions for Use:

- Recommendation of Examiners form is to be submitted by the Principal Supervisor for approval to the Course Co-ordinator and for endorsement by the HDR Director who reports to the Higher Degree Research Committee (HDRC) at the next scheduled HDRC meeting for noting and approval (or approval by circular resolution).
- Once the examiners list has been approved, it is expected that the external examiners will be contacted by the HDR Director as to their availability in order of preference as indicated and justified in the Recommendation of Examiners Form.