



**AUSTRALIS  
BUSINESS  
SCHOOL**

# **HDR Examination Guidelines**

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The HDR Examination Guidelines support the *HDR Assessment and Examination Policy and Procedure* by providing practical direction on how HDR theses are examined at Australis.

The purpose of the HDR examination process is to ensure that each thesis meets the academic standards applicable to the relevant Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) level and complies with Australis' requirements for research integrity and ethical conduct.

Examiners provide independent academic assessment of the thesis and are expected to exercise objective scholarly judgement. These Guidelines set out expectations regarding examiner appointment, examination criteria, reporting requirements, and post-examination processes.

Where there is any inconsistency between these Guidelines and the *HDR Assessment and Examination Policy and Procedure*, the Policy prevails.

## 2 APPOINTMENT OF EXAMINERS

The nomination and appointment of examiners is governed by the *HDR Assessment and Examination Policy and Procedure*. These Guidelines summarise the key requirements.

The Principal Supervisor, in consultation with the Student-Supervisory Panel (SSP), nominates potential examiners using the approved Recommendation of Examiners form.

Examiners must:

- a. Hold a doctoral qualification in a relevant discipline or demonstrate equivalent research expertise and standing appropriate to the level of the award being examined.
- b. Have relevant research expertise in the field of the thesis, evidenced by research outputs, professional standing, or academic leadership in the discipline.
- c. Be of international standing considering the following:
  - Prior experience supervising or examining research at an equivalent or higher level and demonstrate capacity to assess research at the required level.
  - Publications in quality (Q1 or Q2) journals as defined by the Australian Business Deans Council (or equivalent e.g. Academic Journal Guide of the Association of Business Schools UK).
  - Presence at refereed international conferences of standing in the field.
- d. Be external to Australis and independent of the candidate and independent of the Student-Supervisory Panel.
- e. Have no actual, potential, or perceived conflict of interest with the candidate, supervisors, or Australis.

All nominated examiners must declare any actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest prior to appointment.

The HDR Director will determine whether any declared relationship renders a nominee ineligible to act as examiner.

The HDR Director reviews nominations and approves examiner appointments in accordance with the *HDR Assessment and Examination Policy and Procedure*. Approved appointments are reported to the Higher Degree Research Committee (HDRC) for oversight.

The nomination and appointment process is confidential. Candidates may identify individuals they believe should not be appointed due to a potential conflict of interest. Beyond this, candidates must not participate in examiner selection.

### **3 SUBMISSION AND DISPATCH**

A thesis may proceed to examination only after the submission requirements set out in the *HDR Assessment and Examination Policy and Procedure* have been satisfied.

Before dispatch to examiners:

- a. The SSP must confirm that the thesis is ready for examination.
- b. All required compliance matters, including ethics approval where applicable, must be completed.
- c. An Intention to Submit must have been lodged in accordance with the Policy.
- d. Examiner appointments must have been approved by the HDR Director.

Once these requirements are met, the HDR Director will provide the thesis and relevant examination materials to the appointed examiners.

Examiners are normally requested to submit their written reports within six to eight weeks of receipt of the thesis, unless otherwise agreed.

All examination processes and correspondence are confidential. Examiners conduct their assessment independently and must not consult with other examiners, the candidate, or members of the supervisory team prior to submitting their written report. All examination communication is managed by Australis in accordance with the *HDR Assessment and Examination Policy and Procedure*.

### **4 EXAMINATION CRITERIA**

Examiners are expected to assess the thesis as a coherent and integrated body of research, having regard to the level of the award and the standards set out in the *HDR Assessment and Examination Policy and Procedure*. The criteria below are intended to guide academic judgment and should be addressed in the examiner's written report.

## 4.1 Originality and Contribution to Knowledge

Examiners must evaluate the extent to which the thesis makes an original and substantive contribution to knowledge and/or professional practice appropriate to the relevant AQF level.

In doing so, examiners should consider whether:

- the research addresses a clearly defined and significant problem or question;
- the work demonstrates originality in its conceptual framing, theoretical development, methodological approach, or findings;
- the contribution is clearly articulated and situated within the relevant field; and
- for doctoral-level awards, the contribution reflects a substantial and sustained advancement of knowledge or practice.

The significance of the contribution should be assessed in light of disciplinary expectations and the level of the award.

## 4.2 Engagement with Literature and Scholarly Context

Examiners must assess whether the thesis demonstrates informed and critical engagement with relevant scholarly literature and professional knowledge.

In particular, examiners should consider whether:

- the literature review reflects a comprehensive understanding of the field;
- key debates, theories, and prior research have been accurately represented and critically analysed;
- the research is appropriately positioned within existing scholarship; and
- the candidate demonstrates the ability to synthesise and evaluate complex bodies of knowledge.

For doctoral-level awards, examiners should expect evidence of authoritative command of the field and clear positioning of the thesis within broader scholarly discourse.

## 4.3 Research Design and Methodological Rigour

Examiners must evaluate the appropriateness and rigour of the research design and methodology.

This includes consideration of whether:

- the research questions or hypotheses are clearly stated and logically developed;
- the chosen methodology is appropriate to the research problem;
- research methods have been applied systematically and competently;

- limitations have been acknowledged and addressed; and
- the research design supports the validity and reliability of the findings.

For doctoral-level awards, examiners should expect a high level of methodological sophistication and independent research capability.

#### **4.4 Analysis, Evidence and Argument**

Examiners must assess the quality, depth, and coherence of the analysis presented in the thesis.

In doing so, they should consider whether:

- data or evidence have been analysed accurately and rigorously;
- arguments are logically developed and supported by evidence;
- conclusions are clearly derived from the analysis;
- alternative interpretations have been considered where appropriate; and
- the overall thesis demonstrates intellectual coherence and critical reasoning.

The strength of the argument should be evaluated in light of the standards applicable to the relevant AQF level.

#### **4.5 Structure and Academic Presentation**

Examiners must consider whether the thesis is clearly structured and presented in accordance with accepted academic standards.

This includes whether:

- the thesis is logically organised;
- chapters or sections are clearly connected and contribute to the overall argument;
- writing is clear, precise, and academically appropriate;
- referencing and citation practices are accurate and consistent; and
- tables, figures, and appendices are appropriately presented and integrated into the text.

Minor deficiencies in presentation should not outweigh substantive scholarly merit, unless they materially affect clarity or academic integrity.

#### **4.6 Ethical and Integrity Considerations**

Examiners must be satisfied that the research has been conducted and presented in accordance with ethical and integrity requirements.

This includes consideration of whether:

- required ethics approvals have been obtained where applicable;
- data handling and reporting appear responsible and accurate;
- authorship and acknowledgements are appropriately disclosed; and
- there is any indication of academic misconduct, plagiarism, or inappropriate use of artificial intelligence tools.

Any concerns regarding research integrity must be reported to the HDR Director for consideration in accordance with Australis policy.

## **5 Examiner Recommendations**

This section provides guidance on the interpretation of the examination outcome categories set out in the *HDR Assessment and Examination Policy and Procedure*. Examiners are required to make a recommendation that aligns with both their written report and the published outcome categories in the *HDR Assessment and Examination Policy and Procedure*.

Examiners must select one of the approved outcome categories and ensure that their written evaluation clearly supports the recommendation made.

### **5.1 Pass without revisions**

This recommendation indicates that the thesis meets the academic standards of the relevant AQF level for the award and does not require amendment prior to conferral. Minor typographical or formatting issues that do not affect the substance of the work may be noted but do not require formal correction prior to award.

### **5.2 Pass subject to minor revisions**

This recommendation is appropriate where the thesis meets the required academic standard but would benefit from limited amendments that do not alter the core argument, methodology, findings, or contribution. Minor revisions may include clarification of argument, correction of presentation issues, refinement of references, or small improvements in structure.

Examiners should specify the required changes clearly and proportionately.

### **5.3 Pass subject to major revisions**

This recommendation applies where the thesis demonstrates capacity to meet the required standard but requires substantive amendments before the standard can be confirmed. Major

revisions may relate to strengthening analysis, clarifying methodology, addressing gaps in argument, or improving coherence across chapters.

Examiners should clearly identify the areas requiring revision and explain how these changes are necessary to meet the academic standard of the relevant AQF level.

#### **5.4 Revise and resubmit for examination**

This recommendation is appropriate where the thesis does not yet meet the required standard but shows potential to do so with substantial additional work. In such cases, the thesis will require re-examination in accordance with the *HDR Assessment and Examination Policy and Procedure*.

Examiners should provide detailed guidance to support the candidate in understanding the scale and nature of the work required.

#### **5.5 Fail**

This recommendation indicates that the thesis does not meet the academic standards of the relevant AQF level and does not demonstrate sufficient capacity to reach that standard through revision.

Where a Fail recommendation is made, examiners should provide clear and reasoned justification aligned with the examination criteria and AQF expectations.

#### **5.6 Alignment Between Report and Recommendation**

Examiners must ensure that the selected recommendation is consistent with the content and tone of the written report. Where serious deficiencies are identified, the recommendation should reflect their material impact on the thesis as a whole.

Where reports are materially divergent, or where ambiguity arises in the interpretation of recommendations, the matter will be managed in accordance with the *HDR Assessment and Examination Policy and Procedure*. Examiners are not required to resolve such matters directly with each other or with the candidate.

### **6 POST-EXAMINATION PROCESS**

#### **6.1 Review of Examiner Reports**

Upon receipt of examiner reports, the HDR Director (or delegate) will review the reports to confirm that they are complete and aligned with the published outcome categories in the *HDR Assessment and Examination Policy and Procedure*.

Where a report is incomplete or unclear, HDR Director (or delegate), may seek clarification from the examiner before an outcome is determined.

Examiners must not communicate directly with the candidate regarding their assessment. All communication regarding examination reports will be managed by Australis.

## **6.2 Management of Divergent Recommendations**

Where examiner recommendations are materially divergent, the matter will be managed in accordance with the *HDR Assessment and Examination Policy and Procedure*.

This may include seeking clarification from an examiner, appointing an additional examiner, or referring the matter to the Higher Degree Research Committee (HDRC) where escalation is required under the Policy.

Any request for clarification will be managed by the HDR Director (or delegate) and will relate to the examiner's report rather than introduce new assessment criteria.

## **6.3 Communication of Outcomes**

Once a final examination outcome has been determined in alignment with the *HDR Assessment and Examination Policy and Procedure*, the candidate will be formally notified in writing of:

- the outcome category;
- any required revisions;
- the applicable timeframe; and
- information regarding review or appeal rights.

Outcome notification and revision instructions will be provided in writing in accordance with the Policy.

Examiners will be informed that the examination process has concluded and will be thanked for their contribution.