

## Graduate School

# HIGHER DEGREES RESEARCH ('HDR') EXAMINATION GUIDELINES PhD and Masters by Thesis

### Appointment of Examiners

At least three months prior to submission, the Principal Supervisor, in consultation with the Director of HDR Training ('DHDRT'), must submit an application for approval of examiners to the Dean, Graduate School. **Two primary examiners and one reserve** examiner are required to be nominated for a PhD, Masters by Thesis.

It is noted that no examiner can be an SCU staff member, an SCU Adjunct or have close ties to the University. All examiners must be external to this University.

### Provision of Thesis to Examiners

After the student submits the thesis for examination, and the format of the thesis has been approved by the Principal Supervisor and DHDRT, the Graduate School submits the thesis to the two primary examiners for a PhD and Masters by Thesis.

The examiners are requested to return their examination reports and associated documentation within six to eight weeks of receipt of the thesis.

### Standards of Examination

A **Masters by Thesis** work must show evidence of competence in research and scholarship including:

- (i) reviewing literature in a critical and focused manner;
- (ii) deploying analytic, comparative and critically reflective skills as appropriate;
- (iii) gathering and analysing material and interpreting results in an informed and competent manner;
- (iv) utilising and justifying appropriate methodologies, techniques and processes.

The Thesis must be clearly, accurately and cogently written and suitably documented. The work must demonstrate originality and a thorough understanding of the field of study.

A **PhD Thesis** must embody all of the above features of a Masters by Thesis along with the following additional requirements:

- (v) make an original and significant contribution to knowledge and understanding in the field;
- (vi) demonstrate a high-level capacity for independent research

## **Examiners' Reports**

Each Examiner, must submit an independent report which is made up of the Summary Report form provided to each examiner, as well as an in-depth written report. Comments and suggestions must be detailed enough to enable the Dean, Graduate School to gauge the quality of the thesis. Comment on the originality and critical insight of the work are particularly appreciated.

Examiners are invited to indicate whether, and to what extent, they wish to remain anonymous with respect to the supervisor and to the candidate. If preservation of anonymity is not clearly requested by the examiner, anonymity will not normally be preserved.

It is requested that the report conclude with a recommendation of one of the following categories: *(Please note: the A to E designations are categories and are not aligned with the University's grading system)*

- A      Award with no/after minor amendments**  
The thesis meets the required AQF standards in terms of nature and quality of work, and should be accepted as satisfactory for the award of degree once the minor/typographical errors referenced in my report are revised or defended to the satisfaction of the Dean, Graduate School. These corrections would normally be completed within a period of three months
- B      Award after amendments**  
The thesis meets the required AQF standards in terms of nature and quality of work. However, there are passages that need to be revised or defended to the satisfaction of the Dean, Graduate School prior to the thesis being accepted as satisfactory for the award of degree. These amendments would normally be completed within a period of three months.
- C      Allow revision and re-examination**  
The thesis does not yet meet all required AQF standards for the award of the degree and the candidate should complete a further period of research and/or writing to build upon the current work and submit for re-examination. These corrections will be considered by the Principal/Primary Academic/Coordinating Supervisor and Director of Higher Degrees Research Training prior to submission for re-examination, and would normally be completed within six months for a full-time student or 12 months for a part time student.
- D      Allow revision and re-submission as a Masters by Thesis (Note this option is only available for PhD and Professional Doctorate)**  
The thesis does not meet the AQF standard for award of Doctor of Philosophy. The candidate should not be awarded the degree of PhD, but should be allowed to revise the thesis and re-submit the thesis for examination as a Masters by Thesis.
- E      Do not award**  
The thesis does not meet the required AQF standards for the award of the degree, and does not warrant a further period of research and/or writing. The candidate should not be awarded the degree, nor should they be permitted to revise and submit for re-examination.

## **Outstanding Thesis Award**

In addition, the Chancellor of Southern Cross University awards the Chancellor's Medal for an Outstanding PhD Thesis. The medal is given where both examiners highly commend the thesis and agree that the thesis makes an outstanding contribution to the scholarship in its discipline. This opinion would then need to be supported by the Dean, Graduate School.

If you have recommended an “A - Award with no/after minor amendments” could you please provide in your Examiner’s Report, the following additional information:

- In your opinion does the thesis make an outstanding contribution to scholarship in its discipline (NB: as a guideline the University would estimate that a maximum of 5% of all theses would reach this level of attainment).
- State the reasons for your ‘outstanding contribution’ assessment in terms of the international significance of the work and its level of excellence. Please ensure that, if you have not included the reasons in your detailed report, you provide them below.
- How many Higher Degree Research theses have you examined to date?
- Are there other indicators of your professional standing relevant to your assessment of the thesis? If so, please identify.

### **Dealing with Examiners’ Reports**

#### **First round of examination**

##### **Where both examiners agree:**

1. If both examiners award either A or B grades, the candidate can proceed with a Table of Changes and Responses documenting the changes that have been implemented and those which will be challenged, including a detailed justification for the latter. In addition, a thesis file with the changes implemented in track-changes mode will be provided. The Table of Changes and Responses will need to be cross-referenced to the Amended Thesis.

The HDRT Director and Principal Supervisor are responsible for approving the Table of Changes and Responses and updated thesis before they are sent to the Dean Graduate School for approval. Once approved by the Dean, a final version of the thesis is submitted along with a recommendation by the HDRT Director that Academic Board award the degree to the candidate.

2. If both examiners award C grades then the thesis enters the second round of examination. Here the candidate will be permitted to revise the thesis extensively considering the examiners’ comments and recommendations. As part of this, the candidate will provide a Table of Changes and Responses indicating what they have addressed and defending any comments they do not agree with.

The revised thesis will then be sent out to two examiners - these examiners may or may not have been involved in the original examination process. The supervisory team and HDRT Director will nominate two examiners and provide justifications for the choice, if they are different to the original panel, for approval by the Dean. In the case of an original examiner being involved in the second examination process, a Table of Changes and Responses dealing with their examiner’s comments will also be sent out to them.

3. If both examiners award D grades, if the thesis is a PhD thesis, then the candidate will not progress to the second round of examination as a PhD thesis but will be permitted to revise the thesis and re-submit the thesis for examination as a Masters by thesis.
4. If both examiners award E grades, the thesis will be deemed as having failed and will not progress to the second round of examination.

In the case where one of the examiners awards either an A or B grade and the other examiner awards a C grade, but which reads like a B, the Principal Supervisor and Director of HDRT can make a case to the Dean to have it dealt with as such. This could be approved at the Dean’s discretion. In general, this would be an option where the majority of issues linked with the C grade were presentation, grammar and spelling, as well as misinterpretation by the examiner of aspects of the **thesis**. The latter would require strong justification by

the candidate and agreement from the HDRT Director and Principal Supervisor

**First round of examination where there are conflicting examiner reports.**

5. If there are conflicting examiner reports then the thesis is sent out to the reserve/third examiner as part of the first round of examination and the course of action taken will be guided by the majority recommendation as detailed below (ie. If the reports are conflicting and they are anything other than A or B reports, the third/reserve examiner will be engaged). Examples of conflicting examiner reports in first round of examination that result in the thesis being sent to the third/reserve examiner are:

(AB)	C
(AB)	D
(AB)	E
C	D
D	E

**Dealing with the third examiner report:**

When conflicting examiner reports result in the third examiner being brought in as part of the first round of examination, the course of action will be guided by the majority recommendation as detailed below:

6. If the third examiner results in two A or B grades then the process under point 1 is followed.  
7. If the third examiner results in two C grades then the process under point 2 is followed.  
8. If the third examiner results in two D grades then the process under point 3 is followed.  
9. If the third examiner results in two E grades then the process under point 4 is followed.

It should be noted that the third examiner is still part of the first examination round.

**If there is conflict between all 3 examiner reports in the first round of examination the following process applies:**

<b><u>If the grades awarded as part of first round of examination are as follows</u></b>	<b><u>Course of action to be followed</u></b>
(AB)/C/D	Re-examination of PhD (follow point 2)
(AB)/C/E	Re-examination of PhD (follow point 2)/Masters re-examination
(AB)/ D/E	Re-examination of PhD <u>as a Masters (follow point 3)</u> / Masters fail
C/D/E	Re-examination of PhD <u>as a Masters (follow point 3)</u> / Masters fail

**Second Round of Examination:**

The revised thesis will then be sent out to two examiners - these examiners may or may not have been involved in the original examination process. The supervisory team and HDRT Director will nominate two examiners and provide justifications for the choice, if they are different to the original panel, for approval by the Dean. In the case of an original examiner being involved in the second examination process, a Table of Changes and Responses dealing with their examiner's comments will also be sent out to them.

If the two re-examiners award either A or B grades, the candidate can proceed with the process outlined under point 1 above.

If the two re-examiners award C, D or E grades, the thesis will be deemed to have not passed the second round of examination. Consequently, in accordance with SCU Rules relating to awards – Rule 7 – Masters by thesis (48), Rules relating to awards – Rule 8 - Professional Doctorate (48) and Rules relating to awards - Rule 9 - Doctor of Philosophy (49), the degree will not be awarded. In the case of PhD and Professional Doctorate, an award of two C's, two E's or a C and E, will provide the option for re-examination as a Master by Thesis.

If the two re-examiners provide conflicting reports of (AB) and C/D/E then the next step is Adjudication. Here an Adjudicator is chosen by the Principal Supervisor and HDRT Director in consultation with the Dean. This Adjudicator would not have been involved in the previous examination process. The revised thesis, and re-examiner's comments and Table of Changes and Responses will be provided to the Adjudicator. The Adjudicator will not be made aware that the thesis has undergone two rounds of examination. If the Adjudicator concludes that the candidate's responses and revision warrant an A or B grade, the process under point 1 is followed. If the Adjudicator concludes that this has not been achieved, the thesis will be deemed to have not passed the second round of examination. Consequently, in accordance with SCU Rules relating to awards – Rule 7 – Masters by thesis (48), Rules relating to awards – Rule 8 - Professional Doctorate (48) and Rules relating to awards - Rule 9 - Doctor of Philosophy (49), the degree will not be awarded. In the case of PhD and Professional Doctorate, an award of two C's, two D's or a C and D, will provide the option for re-examination as a Master by Thesis.

**The Dean, Graduate School is Responsible for:**

- (i) Approving the candidate Table of Changes and the corrected the thesis
- (ii) Providing the candidate with the opportunity to revise and resubmit the thesis for a second round of examination, if required;
- (iii) Appointing an adjudicator if required;
- (iv) Recommending to Academic Board the award of the degree;

After a decision on the award of a degree has been made, the Dean, Graduate School will normally communicate to the candidate, whether successful or unsuccessful.

**Candidate may Request Examination**

The Dean, Graduate School will consider a request from a candidate that the thesis be submitted to the examiners, even if this is against the advice of the supervisor.

**Notification to Examiners of Outcome**

All examiners are notified of the outcome of the examination process once the examination process is completed