

# Higher Degree Research Candidates Policy

## Section 1 - Purpose

(1) The purpose of this Policy is to outline the governance and degree progression of QUT Higher Degrees by Research and the expectations of higher degrees by research candidates.

## Section 2 - Application

(2) This Policy applies to candidates admitted to postgraduate research courses which are also referred to as higher degree research (HDR) courses and should be read in conjunction with the [Award Courses Policy](#) (in particular as they apply to coursework units) and the [Register of Authorities and Delegations](#) (QUT staff access only) for decision-making in regard to HDR candidates.

## Section 3 - Roles and Responsibilities

(3) Roles and responsibilities of faculties, supervisors and students are detailed in the [Higher Degree Research \(HDR\) Supervisor guidelines](#) (QUT staff and student access only).

Position	Responsibility
Research Degrees Committee	Determines whether a research higher degree candidate has completed all course requirements and recommends conferral of research higher degree awards. Responsible for the management and conduct of higher degree research courses at QUT. Collaborates with and responds to advice from faculties and other stakeholders and oversees all higher degree research courses offered within QUT.
Head of Research Portfolio	Has strategic oversight of higher degree research development and nominates the chair of the Research Degrees Committee.
Faculty Directors of Research Training	Make recommendations to the Research Degrees Committee on matters regarding the admission, candidature milestones and examination of higher degree students. Recommend and approve research curriculum developments in accordance with the <a href="#">Curriculum Design, Approval and Accreditation Policy</a> .
Faculty Associate Deans (Research) or nominee	Ensure effective coordination of higher degree research courses and administration of research infrastructure to support candidates to complete research in a timely manner. Administer allocation of research supervision.
HDR coordinators (note position titles vary depending on the faculty)	Ensure research quality and consistency, and provide reports to Research Degrees Committee in relation to research training matters as articulated in the <a href="#">Higher Degree Research (HDR) Supervisor guidelines</a> (QUT staff and student access only).
Academic Supervisors	Provide academic supervision and research training support in accordance with the <a href="#">Higher Degree Research (HDR) Supervisor guidelines</a> (QUT staff and student access only).
Graduate Research Centre	Provides strategic advice and support to the Head of Research Portfolio and Research Degrees Committee. Provides administrative and client services in the areas of higher degree research admission, enrolment, orientation, candidature, scholarships and examinations.

Position	Responsibility
Graduate Research Education and Development	Provides strategic advice and support to the Head of Research Portfolio and Research Degrees Committee. Provides research training and professional development services for higher degree research candidates and Supervisors.

## Section 4 - Admission

(4) QUT encourages high achieving undergraduates and postgraduates to consider pathways to its higher degree research (HDR) courses. QUT also recognises, where appropriate, equivalent forms of academic experience and non-standard academic pathways.

(5) Admission into higher degree research (HDR) awards is conditional upon:

- a. a candidate demonstrating academic and research potential to meet the requirements of the award;
- b. the University's assessment of its capacity to provide research expertise; suitable, accredited supervisory capacity, and provision of infrastructure.

(6) Research Degrees Committee approves eligibility for admission to Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and Master of Philosophy (MPhil) courses and faculty academic boards approve eligibility for admission to other research courses within their jurisdiction. The Vice-President (Administration) and University Registrar makes offers of [student admission](#).

### Admission Criteria

(7) Entry requirements and selection criteria for higher degree research (HDR) courses are approved by University Academic Board on recommendation from Faculty Academic Boards and Research Degrees Committee.

(8) Admission criteria for Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and Master of Philosophy (MPhil) degrees are outlined in the respective course requirements and published on the [QUT website](#). Standard entry requirements for QUT courses are detailed on the [QUT website](#).

### Transfer of Course

(9) A candidate may transfer from a higher degree research (HDR) course to an alternative QUT course. The conditions for transfer are detailed in the relevant course requirements. Transfer is conditional on the candidate meeting admission requirements of the new course.

(10) Where a candidate is directed to transfer they may initiate withdrawal. Where they decline to do so, the University will initiate termination, and advise the candidate of their right to appeal the decision.

### Readmission

(11) Applicants who wish to re-enter a higher degree research (HDR) course after a period of absence and who are not returning from leave of absence must apply for readmission. Readmission is subject to the availability of supervisory expertise and infrastructure, as assessed at the point of readmission, and requires faculty approval.

(12) Applicants whose candidature has been terminated by the University must also submit a written statement that demonstrates the applicant's readiness to return to their research course. The statement will be considered by Research Degrees Committee on recommendation from the relevant faculty. Normally readmission may be considered 12 months or more after the date of termination.

## Supervision

(13) All higher degree research (HDR) candidates must have a minimum of two Supervisors, one of whom will be the Principal Supervisor and the other an Associate Supervisor. Both Supervisors must be current academic staff members. Additional internal and external Supervisors may be appointed at the discretion of the faculty.

(14) Supervisory allocation is informed by QUT's infrastructure provisions and [Higher Degree Research \(HDR\) Supervisor guidelines](#) (QUT staff and student access only).

## Section 5 - Scholarships

### Living Stipends and Scholarships

(15) Research Degrees Committee considers applications and determines recipients for postgraduate research scholarships. Faculties and research centres may also award scholarships.

### Tuition Fee Sponsorships

(16) Consistent with the Australian Government Research Training Program, all domestic higher degree research (HDR) candidates are normally eligible for a period of tuition fee exemption. QUT offers a limited number of sponsorships to international students based on faculty recommendations.

## Section 6 - Enrolment

### Enrolment

(17) Enrolment in higher degree research (HDR) courses is categorised in three parts. The first part is coursework, which most candidates would normally complete in the early stages of their research course. Coursework requirements are monitored by faculties. The second component is mandatory research training as prescribed by Research Degrees Committee and advised to candidates upon enrolment. The third component is a thesis. Progress on the thesis component is monitored in a way that is consistent with this policy and the relevant course requirements.

(18) Successful completion of prescribed coursework, mandatory research training and thesis components of the HDR courses will lead to eligibility to graduate.

(19) On admission to the HDR course, the faculty will recommend an enrolment and provide course advice compliant with course and research training requirements. The course will take account of the [Advanced Standing Policy](#) as appropriate. Any variation to the course will require approval in accordance with the course requirements.

(20) A HDR candidate requires approval by Research Degrees Committee to be concurrently enrolled in another course of study, particularly another HDR course either at QUT or at another institution. Research Degrees Committee will only approve concurrent enrolment in exceptional circumstances.

### International Exchange

(21) Where appropriate agreements exist, candidates may complete periods of candidature overseas. This will require approval of the faculty and Research Degrees Committee and may be contingent on funding and an agreement with the overseas university.

### Maximum Candidature Time

(22) The maximum candidature time for the completion of a higher degree research (HDR) course will be determined

by Research Degrees Committee or Faculty Academic Board as appropriate and detailed in the relevant course requirements.

## **Leave of Absence**

(23) Candidate applications for leave of absence will be determined by Research Degrees Committee under delegation from University Academic Board and according to a procedure approved by Research Degrees Committee.

(24) Australian Government visa regulations limit international candidates' capacity to apply for leave of absence. International candidates are required to meet visa conditions that may vary from those described in QUT policy.

(25) Higher degree research (HDR) candidates may normally be granted upon application, a maximum of 12 months (365 days) leave of absence or part time equivalent during the term of their candidature. Research Degrees Committee approval must be sought for any periods of leave in excess of 20 days.

(26) In addition to the leave of absence available in clause (25), parental leave for up to 12 months is also available.

## **Study Mode and Employment**

(27) The minimum number of hours, averaged over each year of candidature, to be devoted to research and/or study by candidates are:

- a. part time candidates are required to devote 20 hours per week;
- b. full time candidates are required to devote 35-40 hours per week.

(28) Paid work, including preparation, teaching, marking and research assistant duties may be undertaken, but must not interfere with a candidate's study. A candidate in receipt of a scholarship may be subject to additional restrictions on the amount of paid work allowable as described in the relevant scholarship guidelines.

(29) Candidates may be permitted to conduct their research as an external candidate either elsewhere in Australia or overseas or change their enrolment from internal to external status or vice versa on approval by Research Degrees Committee and faculty as appropriate and taking account of the relevant course requirements.

## **Discontinuation**

### **Withdrawal (Student-Initiated Decision)**

(30) Normally, a student admitted to a higher degree research (HDR) course may at any point in candidature elect to withdraw from their studies.

(31) Where the University has issued a show cause notice under 'Termination' below, the response date advised in that notice will be the last date the candidate may voluntarily withdraw. No academic or financial penalty will be imposed for withdrawal from the thesis component.

### **Termination (University-Initiated Decision)**

(32) Research Degrees Committee may exclude a candidate from an higher degree research (HDR) course having taken account of all relevant circumstances and having given the candidate opportunity to "show cause" why their candidature should not be terminated. Circumstances where the committee may terminate a candidature can include but are not limited to the following:

- a. the quality and progress of a candidate's research gives no reasonable expectation of timely, successful completion of the degree:
  - i. on advice from the faculty in collaboration with the relevant academic Supervisor(s);

- ii. with reference to progress against mandatory milestones within the HDR course requirements;
- b. a candidate has failed to submit a milestone or progress report by the due date without satisfactory reason;
- c. a candidate fails to comply with mandatory research training requirements in a timely way;
- d. a candidate is deemed to have effectively abandoned or ceased their studies.

## Section 7 - Progression

### Progress Reporting

(33) A condition of continuing enrolment in an higher degree research (HDR) course is satisfactory progress toward timely completion. Course requirements normally will outline progress reporting requirements that facilitate monitoring and feedback.

(34) All HDR candidates are required to report on the progress of their research course to the University through Research Degrees Committee at a time and in a manner determined by the committee. Failure to report will be grounds for termination in accordance with the Termination information above in Section 6.

### Mandatory Milestones and Interim Reviews

(35) Research Degrees Committee has defined mandatory milestones for Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and Master of Philosophy (MPhil) students. Faculty Academic Boards may set mandatory milestones for other doctoral candidates which normally will be detailed in the course requirements.

(36) Satisfactory progress with reference to the completion of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and Master of Philosophy (MPhil) milestones will be determined by Research Degrees Committee on faculty recommendation. Further information on [Milestones](#) is available on the Digital Workplace (QUT staff and student access only).

### Unsatisfactory Progress

(37) Where a candidate is shown to be having difficulty meeting progress requirements including progress toward completion by maximum completion date, the faculty will take active steps to provide reasonable support and opportunity for the candidate to rectify progress issues.

(38) Where the progress of a higher degree research (HDR) candidate is deemed unsatisfactory based on the candidate's performance in completing milestones or other research related activities, the candidature may be placed under review or under review to thesis examination. The procedures for placing a HDR candidate under review or under review to thesis examination are determined by Research Degrees Committee.

(39) The purpose of the under review process is to provide additional support to assist the candidate to meet the course requirements and to inform an assessment by the University of the candidate's ability to successfully complete.

(40) A report on the outcome of the under review process will be approved by Research Degrees Committee. Where there is no reasonable prospect of the candidate being able to complete the thesis to an acceptable academic standard for examination, Research Degrees Committee may approve termination of a candidature.

(41) The candidate will be informed of the required remedial action to be followed, a timeline and any interim deadlines within the review period.

(42) A candidate who has been placed under review normally may not take leave of absence until the review has been completed.

# Section 8 - Thesis Lodgement and Examination

## Thesis Lodgement

(43) A thesis will not be accepted for examination by the Director, Graduate Research Centre unless:

- a. the requirements are met for higher degree research (HDR) [Thesis lodgement and submission](#) (QUT staff and student access only);
- b. all candidate [Milestones](#) are completed satisfactorily, and the thesis is of an acceptable academic standard for examination.

(44) Where a thesis is lodged that is not of an acceptable standard for examination, this will be managed according to the section on Unsatisfactory progress.

## Examiners

(45) To ensure academic rigour, integrity, objectivity and comparability with international benchmarks all higher degree research (HDR) thesis examination is managed in accordance with the [Thesis examination process guidelines](#) (QUT staff and student access only) approved by Research Degrees Committee.

(46) Community confidence in the integrity and impartiality of thesis examination is a principal consideration when appointing examiners. Any conflict of interest which would provide reason to doubt an examiner's ability to make an impartial assessment must be declared and managed in accordance with QUT's [Conflict of Interest Policy](#).

(47) Any fees payable in relation to the examination of a candidate shall be determined consistent with Australian standards.

## Higher Degree by Thesis Examinations

(48) Research Degrees Committee will determine the conditions and appoint examiners on recommendation from the faculties to examine all Higher Degree by Research theses. The examiners will critically evaluate whether the conditions for the award of the degree have been met.

## Review of Assessment

(49) A higher degree research (HDR) candidate whose thesis has been failed or whose thesis has been recommended for an alternative exit award may request a review of the examination process and outcome. Acceptable grounds for review will be only on matters of procedure relating to the conduct of the examination or documented evidence of examiner bias as evidenced by comments in the examiners' reports.

(50) A candidate's written review request must be lodged within 20 working days of the date of advice on the outcome of the examination and include the specific grounds on which the request is based. The Chair, Research Degrees Committee will determine whether an examiner conflict of interest exists and/or a procedural error has occurred.

(51) The Chair, Research Degrees Committee, or nominee, will review the candidate's statement and all the available information and make a determination. The Chair will advise the candidate in writing within 10 working days of the decision.

# Section 9 - Appeals

(52) An applicant may appeal a decision to refuse admission to an higher degree research (HDR) course or to exclude

(terminate) from an HDR course. Appeals will be considered by Appeals Committee.

(53) Other appeals will be considered using QUT's [Grievance Resolution Procedures for Student Related Grievances](#).

## Section 10 - Grievance Resolution

(54) A candidate can raise a grievance relating to their candidature via QUT's [Grievance Resolution Procedures for Student Related Grievances](#). Candidates are encouraged to seek support from Academic staff in their school and/or faculty, the Graduate Research Centre, QUT Student Health and Wellbeing, the QUT Guild and/or the QUT Student Ombudsman.

## Section 11 - Outstanding Doctoral Thesis Awards

(55) The QUT Outstanding Doctoral Thesis Awards encourage excellence in higher degree by research. These awards are intended to develop and support Australia's vibrant research culture by profiling:

- a. outstanding contribution to knowledge, and/or;
- b. excellence in higher degree by research.

(56) [Award guidelines](#), determined by Research Degrees Committee, are available from the QUT Students site (QUT staff and student access only).

## Section 12 - Research Training

(57) Non award research training courses, including mandatory training courses, will be coordinated by Research Degrees Committee. Training is offered by a range of service providers including faculties, QUT Library and Graduate Research Education and Development. The training includes face to face and online opportunities.

## Section 13 - Definitions

Term	Definiiton
Candidate	Means any person admitted to a planned course of research leading to a higher degree research at QUT.
Candidature	Means the period of study towards the higher degree research being the period from the date of commencement until the end of enrolment based on successful completion of all coursework and mandatory training completed satisfactorily leading to lodgement for thesis examination (after which time the candidate holds the status of 'Under Examination') or until the candidature is terminated or the candidate withdraws.
Course Work	Means a unit or units of study involving directed learning, including face-to-face instruction, online learning, distance learning or combinations of these.
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)	Means a doctoral degree, which has a research component comprising 66.6 percent or more of the total course of study, and which involves significant and original research that contributes to knowledge, research and theory in a field of study.
Examination	Means the formal assessment of the candidate's thesis to critically evaluate whether the conditions for the award of the higher degree research have been met.
Examiners	Means the appropriately academically qualified specialists appointed to undertake an examination of the candidate's thesis.
Faculty	Means the relevant faculty of QUT.

Term	Definiiton
Higher Degree Research (HDR)	Means any postgraduate masters or doctoral degree with a research component comprising 66.6 percent or more of the total course of study. Higher degree research is also referred to as postgraduate research.
Master of Philosophy (MPhil)	Means a masters degree, which has a research component comprising 66.6 percent or more of the total course of study.
Professional Doctorate (Research)	Means a doctoral degree, which has a research component comprising 66.6 percent or more of the total course of study, and which involves applied research to solve problems or improve practices in a professional field.
Research	Comprises information gathering and knowledge creation, analysis, critical investigation and communication in a fashion acceptable in the field of endeavour. Knowledge creation would encompass creative and professional practice and reflection on this practice.
Thesis	Means a document or collection of materials, which for thesis by creative works includes an exegesis, which provides an argued case for a significant and original contribution to knowledge. The thesis presents the candidate's research and findings and is presented for examination. In the award course, the thesis component is deemed equivalent to the research component.
Under Examination	Is a status assigned to candidates once they have submitted their thesis for examination and prior to lodgement of the final thesis. During this time candidates are not considered to be enrolled students but remain admitted to the course for the purposes of final submission.

## Section 14 - Delegations

(58) Refer to [Register of Authorities and Delegations](#) (C139) (QUT staff access only).

## Status and Details

<b>Status</b>	Current
<b>Effective Date</b>	21st March 2024
<b>Review Date</b>	21st March 2027
<b>Approval Authority</b>	University Academic Board
<b>Approval Date</b>	20th March 2024
<b>Expiry Date</b>	Not Applicable
<b>Policy Owner</b>	Andrew Kerslake Director, Graduate Research Centre
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