
PhD Policy: Approving, Enrolling, Supervising and Examining Candidates

Research Policy

1 Purpose

This policy sets out the procedure for managing the administrative processes for PhD candidature. The compliance with the Policy is overseen by the Research Degrees Committee of the Academic Board.

2 Organisational Scope

This is a University-wide policy.

3 Definitions

For purposes of this policy, unless otherwise stated, the following definitions shall apply:

Administrative Supervisor:	The person in the School with responsibility for administering the candidacy. The Administrative Supervisor must ensure that the candidate and the supervisors follow the regulations for the PhD Degree.
Associate Dean:	Throughout this policy “Associate Dean” refers to the person to whom the Dean of the Faculty has delegated the relevant authority. The Associate Dean may in turn delegate this authority.
Convener:	Convener of the Research Degrees Committee.
Faculty Office:	Term used to mean the various Student and Academic Services Offices in the Faculties.
Full-time PhD Student:	Students are deemed to be full-time when they are able to devote a minimum of 30 hours per week to the thesis, on average, over the year. This workload excludes statutory holiday periods.
Half-time PhD Student:	Students who cannot work on the thesis for the amount of time specified above are deemed to be half-time students.
Head of School (HoS):	Where the Head of School is mentioned in this policy, the duties and functions which derive from this policy may be delegated to a Postgraduate Coordinator.
PhD Statute:	Statute for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.
Postgraduate Coordinator:	A person within the School to whom the Head of School has delegated authority for postgraduate matters.

Research Degrees Committee (RDC):	The University body responsible for the oversight of the PhD and Master's by Thesis.
School Research Committee (SRC):	A committee established in each school with responsibility for advising the Head of School on research and postgraduate matters. In some schools called the Postgraduate Committee.
Supervisor:	A supervisor is a person who is appointed to provide academic and administrative guidance to the candidate during their enrolment for the degree.

4 Policy Content and Guidelines

4.1 Procedure for Application

The procedures for application for the degree, conforming to [PhD Statute](#) 4.1, are set out in the [PhD Handbook](#).

4.2 Initial Research Proposal

- (a) The applicant will negotiate a topic with a potential supervisor and construct an initial research proposal.
- (b) The initial research proposal covers the aim of the project, methods of study, ethical considerations, and resource requirements. As a minimum this will be one page, but schools may require more than this minimum.
- (c) The School Research Committee will scrutinise the initial research proposal and make a recommendation to the Head of School on the academic appropriateness of the proposal, including whether:
 - (i) adequate supervision is available, i.e., a supervisor who is appropriately experienced in the field of research and able to give adequate time to supervision of this particular project and who is acceptable to the student;
 - (ii) the scope of proposed research is appropriate for the degree;
 - (iii) the student's academic background is adequate;
 - (iv) adequate resources are available; and
 - (v) the student would benefit from undertaking up to 60 points of advanced coursework in a relevant subject within the provisional registration period.

Note: The appropriateness of the intended project to the general research strategy of the school may also be taken into account.

4.3 Research Memorandum and Assessment of Resources

- (a) The Head of School (HoS) or Postgraduate Coordinator will provide information on what resources/facilities are available for the student.
- (b) Where the required resources exceed the [Minimum Resources Agreement](#) a specific memorandum should be signed by all parties. The Research Memorandum is an agreement between the student, the supervisor and the HoS about the resources to be provided by the University for the project, including particular library resources, information technology services, and any other special arrangements. This memorandum, which commits the School to providing the agreed funding, will be part of the record of registration.

- (c) The School Research Committee will scrutinise the Research Memorandum to ensure that the resources have been adequately assessed and will be available, as far as can reasonably be predicted, throughout the expected duration of the research project.

4.4 Conversion from a Master's Degree

It is possible for a student who has not yet submitted the Master's thesis to convert their enrolment from a Master's degree into a PhD degree. If the supervisor believes that the student enrolled in a Master's degree has demonstrated the aptitude and level of competence required for PhD study and the research with modifications could form the basis of a PhD thesis, the supervisor should discuss a conversion to a PhD with the student. If it is agreed to convert to a PhD, the student and the supervisor must discuss the change of status with the School Research Committee, who must be satisfied that the existing supervisor is appropriately qualified and experienced to supervise the student at the PhD level. The School Research Committee will then if necessary recommend the appointment of an additional supervisor who is also appropriately qualified and experienced. The student and supervisors will agree in writing on the additional work required for the new degree. This document will substitute for the initial research proposal in the application for a PhD. If the application is approved by the Associate Dean, the student will be deemed to have been provisionally registered for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the date of registration for the Master's degree, but will still have to satisfy the requirements for full registration.

4.5 Attendance at the University

- (a) The normal expectation is that students will attend the University regularly and any enrolment where this is not possible shall require approval at the time of first enrolment or when circumstances change. If significant elements of the thesis project are to be undertaken off campus, the Associate Dean's approval is required.
- (b) Any half-time student has to agree with the School on their period of attendance during each year and their minimum period of enrolment shall be determined by the Associate Dean in accordance with the [PhD Statute](#) 4.2 (b).
- (c) It may be valuable for full-time students to undertake tutoring or other part-time jobs around the University, but it is recommended that students do not overload themselves with paid work outside the scholarly work in preparation for the thesis.
- (d) Permission will not normally be given for students to work away from the University until full registration has been achieved, but permission for absence from the University of up to one month may be granted to undertake fieldwork or library searches necessary for the preparation of the full proposal for the thesis during the period of provisional registration. Where students are given permission to work away from the University following full registration, the minimum expectation is that:
- (i) students will spend one month per year of study (regardless of being full-time or half-time) attending the University or under equivalent supervision organised by VUW;
 - (ii) there shall be regular contact and reporting by the candidate and a memorandum of attendance must be approved by the School Research Committee; and
 - (iii) candidates will pay the same fees as candidates residing in Wellington.
- (e) Where students are working away from the University a memorandum is required (see [School Memorandum for PhD study at a distance](#)).
- (f) The following points may be considered in drafting a memorandum:

- (i) a required period of preparation within the University before the candidate departs for periods of data collection etc;
- (ii) an arrangement for regular contact by mail or electronic communication;
- (iii) a required period of writing-up within the University before submission of the thesis;
- (iv) contributions from the candidate to seminars etc while the candidate is working within the University;
- (v) the extent to which the Minimum Resources Agreement applies.

4.6 Course of Study

- (a) The course of study for a PhD consists of a programme of research and the writing of a thesis carried out under supervision.
 - (i) The thesis must be an integrated report that demonstrates the candidate's ability to carry out independent research, and constitutes a significant and original contribution to knowledge or understanding. A PhD thesis with a creative component must reflect the theory and methodology of an academic framework. A mere account of the candidate's own creative process is not acceptable. The thesis must be presented in a format fit for external examination and its findings must be open to scrutiny and formal evaluation by others in the field. The creative component may not normally exceed 60% of the thesis.
 - (ii) The thesis may include the candidate's previously published work or material based on previous research, as long as the report constituting the thesis is written under supervision during the period of registration.
- (b) The thesis shall not exceed a total of 100,000 words in length, including scholarly apparatus such as bibliographies, foot-notes and end-notes and essential appendices. In exceptional circumstances the Research Degrees Committee may grant permission for a longer thesis to be submitted for examination.
- (c) Where there are cogent reasons why a thesis should not be publicly available for a given limited period, candidates should apply to the Research Degrees Committee for withholding access at the outset of the research, or as soon as the need for an embargo becomes apparent (see [Withholding of Theses Procedure](#)).

4.7 Re-enrolment, Termination, Suspension and Extension

- (a) A candidate pursuing a course of study for the degree shall re-enrol within one month of the expiry of the period of previous enrolment.
- (b) On application from a candidate, the Associate Dean may grant a suspension of enrolment, measured in monthly increments for a period of not less than one month and not more than twelve months. During a student's candidature, the total period of suspension shall not usually exceed twelve months. During suspension of enrolment the candidate will pay no fees and will have no access to university services, including supervision and the library.
- (c) All retrospective suspensions are to be approved centrally by the Convener of the Research Degrees Committee.
- (d) The thesis shall be presented within four years from the date of registration for candidates who have been enrolled full-time, and within six years for candidates who have been enrolled exclusively half-time. In the case of candidates who have been

permitted to change between full-time and half-time, the submission times will be calculated on a pro rata basis. This excludes any period(s) of suspension.

- (e) Extensions to the due date of the thesis may be granted, on application to the Research Degrees Committee, through the Associate Dean. Consideration of extensions shall take account of the student's personal circumstances and the nature of the research project, and consent shall neither be unreasonably withheld nor given without good cause. Extensions will not usually exceed twelve months. All calculations will exclude any periods of suspension.
- (f) Suspensions which lead to an overall enrolment period of more than 5 years must be approved by the Research Degrees Committee.

4.8 Movement from Provisional to Full Registration

4.8.1 Confirmation of Full Registration

- (a) A decision on registration is expected within 12 months of provisional registration for full-time candidates. A further three months of provisional registration (to a total of 15 months) is allowed under the [PhD Statute](#) 4.2(a). For half-time candidates, a decision on registration is expected within 24 months of provisional registration. Extensions beyond these times will be unusual and require justification to the Associate Dean.
- (b) If there is any doubt as to the ability of a candidate to proceed, this is the appropriate time for that to be raised for the benefit of both the candidate and the University.
- (c) Where a candidate has approval to undertake coursework:
 - (i) it will normally be completed within the provisional registration period;
 - (ii) the coursework should be relevant to the proposed topic and necessary to the successful completion of the research proposal and acceptance into full registration; and
 - (iii) the coursework may count towards the research proposal and full registration but will not count towards the thesis.
- (d) To progress from provisional to full registration, the candidate must write a full research proposal (see 4.8.2). It must be submitted to the School's Research/Postgraduate Committee (SRC) or a panel of 3 to 5 members formed specifically for this purpose. The SRC will scrutinise the proposal to establish:
 - (i) that the student has sufficient knowledge and understanding of the topic;
 - (ii) that the proposal outlines an appropriate theoretical framework which will lead to an original and defensible theory;
 - (iii) that the proposed research is original or adds value to existing knowledge;
 - (iv) that the research can be placed into the existing body of knowledge – for this purpose a summary of the recent research literature relevant to the topic must be included; and
 - (v) That any necessary coursework undertaken within the provisional registration period has been completed successfully and assessed at the required standard.
- (e) Candidates may also be required to present their proposal in accordance with school or programme requirements.

- (f) (i) Each school or programme may establish guidelines, in addition to the University requirement to submit a full research proposal, as to what constitutes satisfactory progress for candidates to move from provisional to full registration. Where PhD candidates have been required to enrol in courses, appropriate achievement standards should be specified. Such guidelines are developed by the SRC and approved by the Associate Dean.
- (ii) Once a candidate has been admitted to full registration they will not normally be permitted to undertake additional coursework except at their own expense (or otherwise funded).
- (g) The SRC will assess whether the candidate has met the criteria and will report (using the Movement from Provisional to Full Registration template) to the Associate Dean. Copies of the report are to be sent to the Head of School, supervisors and the candidate. The SRC may:
- (i) recommend approval of the candidate's transfer to full registration;
 - (ii) require that full registration be delayed by up to six months;
 - (iii) recommend the candidate transfer to a Master's degree; or
 - (iv) terminate the candidate's registration.

Note: Full registration is confirmed by the Associate Dean, on receipt of the recommendation from the SRC. A candidate's progress during full registration continues to be monitored through six-monthly progress reports.

- (h) A candidate whose registration is terminated has the right of appeal to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) through the Postgraduate Research Coordinator, Research and Postgraduate Studies office.

4.8.2 Full Research Proposal

- (a) A full research proposal provides evidence of the viability of the research proposed and the capacity of the student to carry out the research. Each discipline will establish its own requirements for an acceptable proposal, which might include presentation of the proposal in a seminar.
- (b) The proposal will, to the extent appropriate for the discipline, be between 3,000 – 10,000 words and is expected to contain the following elements:
- (i) an outline of the basic thesis/research question;
 - (ii) appropriate theoretical framework(s);
 - (iii) a literature review. This is seen as the appropriate way to show that the candidate has understood and can interpret the literature;
 - (iv) a demonstration that the methodology is appropriate;
 - (v) a statement as to whether ethical approval is required and, if so, whether or not that has been obtained from all required institutions. If approval has not been obtained the timetable for approval is to be noted;
 - (vi) a statement that there are no foreseeable cultural, social or legal impediments to the successful completion of the research.
- (c) The proposal will establish preliminary goals for the next six months, and will contain a tentative timetable for the completion of the thesis.

4.8.3 Conversion to a Master's Degree

It is possible for a student who has not yet submitted the PhD thesis to convert their enrolment from a PhD to a Masters degree. This option may be chosen by the student, or when the supervisors believe that a student has not demonstrated the aptitude and level of competence required for PhD study and that the research with modifications, and any advanced courses undertaken in the period of provisional registration, could form the basis of a Master's thesis. Written application to convert to a Master's degree must be made to the Associate Dean. The written support of the administrative supervisor and supervisors is also needed, as is the agreement of the student.

4.9 Supervision and Supervisors

4.9.1 Appointment of Supervisors

- (a) Each candidate will work under the guidance of two supervisors and will have an administrative supervisor as well. It is recognised that in many cases the major role in supervision will fall on one supervisor (the primary supervisor) and that the other supervisor (the secondary supervisor) will have a relatively minor role. In other cases each supervisor may play a more or less equal role; in these cases it is useful to talk of 'co-supervision'. The primary supervisor must be a professor or lecturer of the University in the sense of the [Victoria University of Wellington Act 1961](#), which includes senior lecturers, readers and associate professors or, in individually argued cases, people holding appointments such as research fellowships or Honorary Research Associates.
- (b) The Administrative Supervisor is generally the Head of School/Programme in which the student is enrolled or, in the case of an inter-disciplinary thesis involving more than one school/programme, the head of the school with which the student is most closely associated. However, there will be some cases in which it will be inappropriate for the head to undertake such administrative responsibility because, for example, they are the primary supervisor or otherwise feel unable to exercise the required administrative functions in relation to the supervising staff member. In these cases, an alternative member of staff should be appointed by the head of school to that role.
- (c) In some cases it may be appropriate for a scholar from outside the University to be appointed to the supervisory team as an external supervisor. In these cases an external supervisor will be appointed as an Honorary Research Associate (HRA) of the School where they will be supervising. To confirm the appointment the Administrative Supervisor must make an appropriate recommendation and send curriculum vitae to the Associate Dean to be forwarded to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) for appointment (see [Procedure for Appointing Honorary Research Associates](#)). It is the responsibility of the Administrative Supervisor to monitor the involvement of the HRA. This includes contribution to the six-monthly progress reports by the HRA.
- (d) Where an external party is involved in supervising a student:
 - (i) any agreement must comply with the [Management of External Research Consultancy and Related Contracts Policy](#) or any policy that supersedes that document and the [Intellectual Property Policy](#). Also see the template on [Agreements with External Parties](#);
 - (ii) the relationship must be made the subject of an agreement between the University, the student and the external party before the project commences. This agreement will address issues relevant to the relationship and having a bearing on

- the expectation and obligations of the parties concerned. It will also establish the terms and conditions under which it is intended that the project proceed;
- (iii) the agreement should include provision for revisiting the agreed terms during the project;
 - (iv) the agreement and any revision of it should be monitored as part of the six-monthly reporting requirement that applies to all postgraduate research enrolments.
- (e) If the supervisory team for a student is changed the Administrative Supervisor should seek approval for the change from the Associate Dean and provide them with the details of the change and the rationale for the adequacy of the new supervisors. The changes take effect on the Administrative Supervisor's receipt of the Associate Dean's approval.
 - (f) Where the change in supervision is for reasons that may compromise the ability of the former supervisor to take any further role in the assessment of the student, this change shall be notified to the Research Degrees Committee by the Associate Dean.
 - (g) The Head of School should ensure that appropriate supervision arrangements are in place if the primary supervisor is absent from the University for any period longer than one month.

4.9.2 Qualifications and Training of Supervisors

- (a) Only those academic staff with a doctorate in an appropriate subject area or evidence of an established research record should undertake the primary supervision of students and then only if they have appropriate experience and/or training.
 - (i) 'Experienced' staff members are those who have previously acted as primary or co-supervisor of at least one successful doctoral candidate or three successful Master's candidates. Those who lack such experience qualify as supervisors by attending one of the supervisors' development programmes conducted periodically.
 - (ii) Heads of School have responsibility for ensuring that only qualified staff members gain approval as thesis supervisors and for advising staff to complete a development programme.
- (b) New staff members must attend a development programme during their probationary period. New staff who are already experienced supervisors as specified in 4.9.2 (a) are expected to attend the training session dealing with VUW Statutes and Policies.
- (c) Honorary Research Associates (HRAs) are invited to participate in an appropriate development programme as soon as possible after agreeing to serve in a supervisory capacity. The Research and Postgraduate Studies office will ensure that all HRAs are provided with a PhD Handbook, VUW policies and are invited to training opportunities as part of their appointment.
- (d) Postgraduate Coordinators should ensure that all supervisors are provided with a PhD Handbook. Heads of Schools (or delegated authority) should ensure that new supervisors are advised on VUW policies and practices and training opportunities.

4.9.3 Supervisors' Responsibilities

The responsibility of supervisors is to assist students to complete the research within an agreed time frame. This includes taking reasonable steps consistent with available resources:

- (a) to provide a framework within which the academic work can take place;

- (b) to provide academic guidance;
- (c) to assess progress;
- (d) to facilitate administrative compliance;
- (e) to act as a guide to university facilities;
- (f) to guide the student into wider contacts as appropriate to the discipline ; and
- (g) to encourage the student to participate in university intellectual life.

4.10 Responsibilities of the Student

Completing a doctoral programme requires progressive development of skills, competence and confidence. Students must take responsibility for independently pursuing their studies with the guidance of their supervisors in a manner which develops their own intellectual independence. This includes taking reasonable steps, consistent with available resources:

- (a) to plan and actively pursue the research;
- (b) to identify and deal with problems;
- (c) to comply with administrative requirements;
- (d) to meet ethical guidelines;
- (e) to give adequate notice of intention to submit (i.e. three months);
- (f) to take responsibility for the final form of the thesis; and
- (g) to participate in university intellectual life.

4.11 Evaluating the Progress of Students

- (a) Supervisors are responsible for providing to students adequate and timely feedback and evaluation of progress. In particular if any doubt arises as to the ability of a candidate to complete the PhD this must be raised and dealt with as soon as is practicable for the benefit of both the student and the University.
- (b) Supervisors should provide feedback in writing on written work.
- (c) Supervisors must keep a record of supervisory meetings and record any significant advice or transactions that are not dealt with in six-monthly reports.
- (d) Six-monthly reports are required as part of the postgraduate supervision process in May and November in each year of enrolment. The intention is that both the supervisor and the candidate see and acknowledge each other's written comments (see the [Six-monthly Progress Report template](#)).
- (e) The Faculty Office initiates the six-monthly reporting process of the students for whom they have responsibility, but the writing of the report is primarily the responsibility of the supervisors, in close conjunction with the student. Identified problems and proposed methods of addressing them should be discussed with the student before the report is finalised.
- (f) The final version of the six-monthly report, which has been agreed to and signed by student and supervisors, must be reviewed by the Head of School (HoS) before being submitted to the Associate Dean. A copy must be provided to the student. The report will then be filed in the student's file held by the relevant Faculty Office. Except in exceptional circumstances, the Associate Dean will not approve applications for re-

enrolment unless one six-monthly report for the previous enrolment period is held in the student's file.

- (g) Where there are major or continuing problems with a student's performance, the six-monthly report should specify what action needs to be taken to rectify the problems and stipulate a time period within which such action is to be taken. The HoS must agree to, and monitor, the proposed actions. In the event that the student fails to take the required action so that problems persist, the HoS must notify the Associate Dean who may then take the action, upon the recommendation of the Administrative Supervisor, to discontinue the student's enrolment. The HoS must offer the student the opportunity to respond and then will monitor the proposed actions. The HoS will also inform the student of their entitlement to representation, and the advisory and support services offered by VUWSA via the Student Advocates and the PGSA.

4.12 Evaluating Supervision

- (a) The six-monthly report provides the regular opportunity for students to comment on the quality of their supervision. In addition to this, where specific problems arise, students should raise them with the Postgraduate Coordinator or the Administrative Supervisor at any time.
- (b) For serious or continuing problems, students should consult the Associate Dean.

4.13 Appointment of Examiners

- (a) The PhD thesis is examined by three examiners, who are people with standing in the field of the thesis being examined and who normally have experience of PhD supervision and examination. Usually at least one of these examiners will be a member of the staff of an overseas university or similar institution (the overseas examiner), one examiner will be from another New Zealand university (the external examiner), and the third examiner will be a member of the Victoria University staff (the internal examiner). If the candidate is a member of Victoria University staff the internal examiner should not normally be a close working colleague e.g. a member of the same teaching/research group.
- (b) Examiners should not have been the primary or co-supervisor of the thesis.
- (c) Prospective examiners should be approached informally by the supervisor or Administrative Supervisor well in advance of the expected submission of the thesis. This is to confirm that they are willing to examine and able to complete the examination in the expected timeframe of eight weeks. Candidates can be consulted on potential examiners, but may not be told which examiners have been nominated or appointed.
- (d) Suitable examiners are those who have no significant personal, professional or contractual relationships with the candidate. Examiners must be in a position to provide a fair and impartial assessment of the thesis. In cases where the most qualified examiner has such a relationship with the candidate, the Research Degrees Committee should be consulted.
- (e) The Head of School (HoS), after appropriate consultation, shall recommend examiners to the Associate Dean who will, if satisfied, endorse this recommendation and send it on to the Convener. Concerns with any aspect of the recommendation of examiners should initially be addressed to the Associate Dean but the examiners are approved and appointed by the Convener. The HoS is required to provide a brief curriculum vitae for the external New Zealand examiner and the overseas examiner, plus a rationale for why the three proposed examiners are an appropriate examination panel.

4.14 Submission

- (a) The candidate must be enrolled at the time of submission of the thesis. The University expects that normally a candidate would be enrolled for the three months immediately preceding submission. Students may appeal to the Convener in exceptional circumstances.
- (b) A grace period starts on the last day for which fees are paid and covers the following 28 days. If a thesis is submitted within the grace period, no extra fees will be charged.
- (c) The decision to make application for a thesis to be examined is one to be made by the candidate after consultation with the supervisor. However, the University has an obligation to examiners to take reasonable steps to ensure that any thesis sent for examination is complete and otherwise suitable for examination.
- (d) A thesis is not complete unless it constitutes a complete scholarly work inclusive of all scholarly apparatus usual in the discipline. It should be presented in a form regarded as suitable for examination in the discipline concerned and it should conform to all other formal requirements of the University for presentation of a thesis, including word limits.
- (e) When the candidate indicates the thesis is ready to be submitted, it should be reviewed by all supervisors before application is made for examination. This review period should not usually exceed four weeks.
- (f) If the supervisors are of the opinion that the thesis is not suitable for examination, the supervisor may recommend to the Associate Dean that the thesis not be accepted for examination. Such a recommendation shall be accompanied by reasons and notified to the candidate who shall have the opportunity to make submissions to the Associate Dean.
- (g) The Associate Dean, after appropriate consultation, may decide that the thesis is not suitable for examination, either because it is not complete or on the grounds that no examiner could reasonably be expected to recommend that the candidate be awarded either a PhD or a Master's degree. If so, the candidate shall be advised of the reasons for the decision and the changes necessary to make the thesis suitable for examination.
- (h) If the Associate Dean decides that a thesis is not suitable for examination, the candidate may appeal against that decision to the Research Degrees Committee (RDC). However, even if the RDC should support the Associate Dean's decision, the candidate still has the right to have the thesis examined.
- (i) The candidate shall submit three copies of the thesis to the Faculty Office and in addition, where required, an electronic copy and apply for examination. The Faculty Office will require the candidate to:
 - (i) sign a "Statement of Authorship" form to confirm that the work of others has been acknowledged in the thesis and that the thesis has not been submitted previously for another degree;
 - (ii) sign two "Availability of Thesis" forms to consent that the thesis may be consulted, borrowed, copied or reproduced in accordance with the Library regulations. This requirement is delayed if the candidate has received the approval of the RDC to have access to the thesis withheld for a limited given period of time (see [Withholding of Theses Procedure](#)).
 - (iii) sign a statement that the thesis does not exceed 100,000 words in length (inclusive of scholarly apparatus).

- (j) On submission of the thesis, the Faculty Office will arrange for the candidate to complete and submit an Exit Questionnaire.

4.15 Examination

- (a) The examination comprises an expert review of the thesis by three examiners and an oral examination. However, in some faculties the requirement for an oral examination is waived unless specifically requested by an examiner, a supervisor, or the candidate. The Research Degrees Committee is responsible for reviewing all reports and deciding the outcome of the examination process.
- (b) Candidates can normally expect the examination process to take approximately four months (including eight weeks for the examiners to complete their reports). In exceptional circumstances the process may take several months longer.
- (c) The awarding of the PhD will only be determined on the thesis, regardless of any coursework undertaken during candidature, unless otherwise specified in the statutes.

4.16 Examination of the Thesis

- (a) The Faculty Office will send examiners a copy of the thesis and adequate information detailing what is required from them. This information is specified in the [Letter and Information for PhD Examiners](#).
- (b) Consultation between examiners or between examiners and either the candidate or supervisors is prohibited before reports have been submitted to the Associate Dean.
- (c) Where there is an oral examination, the examination process is not complete until the end of the oral examination. Any comments made up until that point are provisional only.
- (d) After consideration of the thesis, the examiners will report in writing to the Associate Dean. As the University requires that examiners' reports should be independent of each other, they should be sent to the relevant Faculty Office.
- (e) The recommendations of the examiners on the basis of their reading of the thesis should be one of the following:
 - (i) that the thesis meets the requirements of the PhD.
 - (ii) that the thesis will meet the requirements of the PhD on completion of any minor amendments (defined in 4.20.1 below) to the thesis recommended by the examiners, to the satisfaction of the internal examiner.
 - (iii) that the thesis will meet the requirements of the PhD on completion of any revisions (defined in 4.20.2 below) to the thesis recommended by the examiners, to the satisfaction of the internal examiner.
 - (iv) that the thesis does not meet the requirements of the PhD, but that the candidate be permitted to resubmit a revised thesis within a specified period. In this case the examiners should offer detailed advice to assist the candidate towards a successful resubmission. It should be noted that resubmission is a clement option offered to the candidate in order to bring a potentially valuable but currently unsatisfactory thesis up to standard; accordingly a second resubmission will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances and any such recommendation will be taken to be equivalent to 4.16 (e) (v).
 - (v) that the candidate be declined a PhD but offered a Master's degree, subject to any minor amendments (see 4.20.1) that may be required.

- (vi) that no degree be awarded and the candidate's registration be terminated.
- (f) Where examiners make differing recommendations on the outcome of the examination the Associate Dean may ask the internal examiner (or a New Zealand based examiner) to coordinate consultation between examiners to see if the differing recommendations can be resolved. Where the examiners agree on a joint report on the outcome of the examination, this report will be submitted to the Associate Dean by the coordinating examiner.
- (g) The Associate Dean will send a report of the examination of the thesis to the PhD Convener, including all the examiners' reports and a recommendation on the outcome. The Research Degrees Committee (RDC) is responsible for reviewing the reports of the Associate Dean and the examiners and making a decision on the outcome of this stage of the examination process on behalf of the Academic Board.
- (h) On receipt of the report from the Associate Dean:
 - (i) Where the Faculty or an examiner requires an oral examination and the examiners' reports justify proceeding to an oral examination, the Convener will ask the Associate Dean to arrange it (see 4.17 below).
 - (ii) Where the examiners are in agreement the Convener will usually accept their recommendation.
 - (iii) Where the examiners' views of the thesis differ significantly or are in other ways controversial, the Convener will consult with the academic members of the RDC; the Convener may require an oral examination.
 - (iv) In cases where there is significant disagreement between examiners, it may be appropriate to initiate a discussion between the examiners with the objective of achieving consensus. The discussion will be coordinated by the Convener or their nominee.
 - (v) In cases where differences prevent the examiners agreeing on a joint recommendation, the RDC may elect to proceed on a majority report. Alternatively, the committee may ask for further efforts to reconcile the examiners or seek a recommendation from a referee to whom the thesis and the anonymised examiners' reports shall be referred. The referee will advise the Convener of their recommendation.
- (i) When the RDC has reached a decision on the acceptability of the thesis the PhD Convener will inform the Associate Dean who will convey the decision on the acceptability of the thesis in writing, and send copies of the examiners' reports, to the candidate, the primary supervisor, the Administrative Supervisor and the Head of School.
- (j) If the supervisor or the candidate requests an oral examination (see 4.17) the Convener will ask the Associate Dean to arrange one. On receipt of the report on the oral examination from the Associate Dean, the RDC will reconsider all the reports and make a final decision on the acceptability of the thesis.
- (k) Any candidate for whom the result of the first round of the examination process is that the thesis may be resubmitted, may, at their discretion, opt to make only minor editorial changes to the thesis and to accept the relevant general Masters qualification. The Masters in such cases will be awarded at the Pass level. Once the thesis has been resubmitted, this option no longer applies.

4.17 Oral Examination

- (a) The purpose of the oral examination is to defend the thesis and determine the result. Additional purposes may include: checking the understanding of particular aspects; allowing the candidate to demonstrate the extent of work involved; clarifying the scope and detail of the revisions required, particularly where there are conflicting statements from examiners.
- (b) In some faculties and schools an oral examination is always held as part of the PhD examination process, and this is determined by faculty policy approved by the Faculty Boards.
- (c) An oral examination may also be requested by a supervisor or the candidate, after consulting one another, within 10 days of receiving copies of the examiners' reports and the decision of the Research Degrees Committee. A request for an oral examination should be made to the Convener via the Associate Dean and must be justified in terms of a faculty statement of the purpose of the oral examination as in 4.16 (a).

4.18 Arrangement of Oral Examination

- (a) The Associate Dean must send copies of the examiners' reports to the Administrative Supervisor, the primary supervisor, the Head of School, the other examiners and the candidate at least five days before the oral examination takes place.
- (b) The oral examination is organised by the Associate Dean, who will also chair the oral or appoint an appropriate person as chairperson.
- (c) Every attempt will be made to involve all examiners in the oral, using technology where appropriate, particularly for overseas examiners. In cases where the overseas examiner is not present, questions from them will be presented at the oral examination. The primary supervisor will usually be in attendance, but not as part of the examining panel, and other supervisors may also attend.
- (d) When both external examiners are overseas or when the candidate has already taken up an overseas position, an examination by telephone or video conference may be approved. However, there should always be one examiner present with the candidate. Where this is not possible, a qualified academic must be present with the candidate and must supply a written statement that the examination was conducted properly.
- (e) Circumstances will occasionally make it necessary to depart from the usual examination procedure. The Convener of the Research Degrees Committee (RDC) should be consulted in all such circumstances; the RDC must approve any unusual procedure.

4.19 Report of an Oral Examination

- (a) All examiners present at the oral examination must reach agreement and sign a report on the oral examination.
- (b) The Associate Dean must then make a report on the examination as a whole to the Research Degrees Committee (RDC). Where the overseas examiner's report recommends an outcome which is acceptable to the examiners present at the oral examination, a simple statement may be produced immediately. In other cases, it is the responsibility of the Associate Dean to coordinate any required negotiations, and to report the results to the RDC.
- (c) Following the completion of the oral examination, the examiners' agreed recommendation to the RDC must take one of the following forms:

- (i) That the candidate be awarded the PhD.
 - (ii) That the candidate be awarded the PhD subject to the completion of any minor amendments (defined in 4.20.1) to the thesis recommended by the examiners, to the satisfaction of the internal examiner.
 - (iii) That the candidate be awarded the PhD subject to the completion of any revisions (defined in 4.20.2) to the thesis recommended by the examiners, to the satisfaction of the internal examiner.
 - (iv) That although the thesis is acceptable (or acceptable with minor amendment/revision), the degree not be awarded but that the candidate be permitted to re-present himself/herself for oral or written examination within a specified period of time.
 - (v) That the degree not be awarded but that the candidate be permitted to resubmit a revised thesis within a specified period. In this case the examiners should offer detailed advice to assist the candidate towards a successful resubmission.
 - (vi) That the candidate be declined a PhD but offered a Master's degree, subject to any minor amendments (see 4.20.1) that may be required.
 - (vii) That no degree be awarded and the candidate's registration be terminated.
- (d) Once the outcome of examination has been determined by the RDC, copies of the examiners' reports are sent to the Administrative Supervisor, the primary supervisor, the Head of School and the candidate.

4.20 Minor Amendments and Revisions

- (a) The responsibility for overseeing the minor amendments or revisions is usually taken by the internal examiner. If the internal examiner is not available, then the principal supervisor will take this role. If the primary supervisor is not available then the administrative supervisor will take this role.
- (b) After consultation with the candidate, the person responsible for overseeing the minor amendments or revisions will stipulate in writing the timeframe within which these must be completed.
- (c) Once the minor amendments or revisions are confirmed by the internal examiner, the candidate will ensure the year on the title page of the thesis is the year of lodgement in the library.

4.20.2 Minor Amendments

- (a) Amendments that are 'minor' should be able to be completed within two to four weeks of full-time work. The internal examiner (or primary supervisor) is responsible for ensuring that the candidate is fully informed of any corrections which must be made before the final submission of the thesis.
- (b) When the candidate has completed the corrections, they are inspected by the internal examiner who writes to the Associate Dean (with a copy to the Convener of the Research Degrees Committee), confirming that the requirements of the examiners have been met in full.

4.20.3 Revisions

- (a) Where examiners require 'revisions' it is expected that the thesis is generally of the required standard and the changes required are such that: it does not need to be re-examined as a whole; the changes that the examiners require are such that it is

reasonable for the internal examiner alone to assess the revised thesis; the revisions are of a kind and scope that it would be reasonable to expect that they might be completed within six months of full-time work. The revisions required will be notified to the candidate in writing.

- (b) It is the responsibility of the Associate Dean to appoint a person or a panel to ensure that the candidate understands exactly what is required to meet the examiners' concerns and to oversee the revision process. The suggested revisions must be completed to the satisfaction of this person or panel who will then notify the Associate Dean (with a copy to the Convener of the Research Degrees Committee) that the requirements of the examiners have been met.

4.20.4 Disputes about Revision

- (a) If there is substantial disagreement between the two external examiners and/or the internal examiner, it is recommended that the internal examiner discuss the matter with senior researchers in the School or wider university. Following such discussions, a formal memorandum of understanding should be agreed before entering into negotiations with the candidate as to the completion of these revisions.
- (b) If there is good reason why the internal examiner should not be the person to undertake this task, an explanation should be given to the Research Degrees Committee, who will then appoint an appropriate substitute.

4.21 Revision and Resubmission of Thesis for Second Examination

- (a) Where the examiners have recommended resubmission and the Research Degrees Committee (RDC) confirms the result, all copies of the thesis are returned to the candidate who is given the date by which resubmission must be made. The internal examiner is responsible for explaining to the candidate, in writing with a copy to the Convener of the RDC, what parts of the thesis require revision and for what reasons.
- (b) Re-enrolment is required for resubmission. The University expects that normally a candidate would be enrolled for the three months immediately preceding submission. Students may appeal to the Convener in exceptional circumstances.
- (c) Where resubmission is involved, a period of further supervision will be required. It is the duty of the School Research Committee to organise this, and to change the primary supervisor if this is academically advisable. Any such change must be notified to the relevant Faculty Office.
- (d) When the thesis is resubmitted, the examination process begins again. The preferred situation will always be that the same examiners will re-examine the thesis. If new examiners are required the process as set out in 4.13 will apply.
- (e) Any recommendation regarding a second oral examination requires confirmation by the RDC.

4.22 Return of Copies of the Thesis

- (a) When the result of the examination is communicated to the examiners, they should return their copies of the thesis if they have not already done so.
- (b) Where an examiner has annotated the thesis, it should be returned to the candidate in a timely fashion.
- (c) Where the examiners have recommended that the degree not be awarded, it is expected that all copies of the thesis are returned to the candidate.

4.23 Confirmation of Examiners' Recommendations

Where the Research Degrees Committee (RDC) is satisfied that the examination has been properly carried out, the committee will confirm the examiners' recommendation. The RDC decides the result of the examination on behalf of the Academic Board. The Associate Dean communicates the result to the candidate and is also responsible for ensuring the examination result is conveyed in writing to the supervisors, administrative supervisor and all examiners.

4.24 Deposit of Thesis in the Library

- (a) Where the decision has been made that the degree is to be awarded, copies of the final thesis are lodged in the University Library in accordance with the [Library Statute](#).
- (b) The Faculty Office is responsible for:
 - (i) checking that the year on the title page of the thesis is the same as the intended year of lodgement;
 - (ii) ensuring that the candidate has deposited the required copies in the Library. A copy of the receipt for these must be forwarded to the Faculty Office before the degree can be conferred; and
 - (iii) informing Information Technology Services that the candidate should be removed from the staff domain.

4.25 Notification of Results

The official result is given in writing by the Associate Dean, or nominee, and a successful candidate is invited to graduate.

5 Legislative Compliance

The University is required to manage its policy documentation within a legislative framework. The legislation directing this policy is the:

[Victoria University of Wellington Act 1961](#)

6 References

[Degree of Doctor of Philosophy Statute](#)

[Intellectual Property Policy](#)

[Library Statute](#)

[Management of External Research Consultancy and Related Contracts Policy](#)

[Recognition of Authorship Policy](#)

[Withholding of Theses Procedure](#)

Previous version: [archived PhD Policy 20081110](#)

7 Appendices

None

8 Approval Agency

Academic Board

9 Approval Dates

This policy was originally approved on 2 December 2004

This version was approved on: 11 November 2008

This version takes effect from: 11 November 2008

This policy will be reviewed by: 11 November 2011

10 Statute Sponsor

Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)

11 Contact Person

The following person may be approached on a routine basis in relation to this policy:

Dr. Theresa Sawicka

Research Manager

Extn. 5190