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## Master's Thesis Policy

### Research Policy Group

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#### 1. Purpose:

This policy sets out the procedure for managing the administrative processes for Master's by Thesis 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:

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.
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.
Postgraduate Coordinator:	A person within the School to whom the HoS has delegated authority for postgraduate matters.
Research Degrees Committee (RDC):	A committee of the Academic Board responsible for the oversight of the PhD and Master's by Thesis Degrees.
School Research Committee (SRC):	A committee established in each school with responsibility for advising the HoS on research and postgraduate matters.
Supervisor:	A supervisor is a person who is appointed to provide academic and administrative guidance to the candidate during their enrolment for the degree.
Thesis:	A Master's thesis is the outcome of independent research, scholarship, and/or creative activity conducted under supervision and having a value of 90 points or more. For works of design, creation or performance, the student should include a written commentary on the work.

## 4. Policy Content and Guidelines:

### 4.1 Entry Requirements

Entry requirements and general requirements for the various Master's degrees by thesis are set out in the statutes for the relevant degrees in the VUW Calendar. Refer to the [Outline of the Application Procedure for Master's Degree by Thesis](#).

### 4.2 Research Proposal

- (a) The applicant will negotiate a topic with a potential supervisor and construct a research proposal.
- (b) The research proposal covers the aim of the project, methods of study, ethical considerations, and resource requirements. As a minimum this proposal 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. It should be borne in mind that a PhD thesis, which has an expected completion time of 3 years, has a maximum length of 100,000 words (see the [Degree of Doctor of Philosophy Statute](#) 4.5 (e)) and that a satisfactory proposal for a Master's degree should be for a thesis proportionate in scope to the PhD thesis;
  - (iii) the student's academic background is adequate;
  - (iv) adequate resources are available.

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

### 4.3 Enrolment

Enrolment into the degree will usually occur once the School Research Committee has made a favourable recommendation as in 4.2 above.

*Note: Where the thesis is offered as Part 2 of a Master's degree enrolment for the whole degree will take place at the beginning of Part 1*

#### 4.3.1 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 six months. During a student's candidature, the total period of suspension shall not usually exceed six months.
- (c) All retrospective suspensions are to be approved centrally by the Convener of the Research Degrees Committee.
- (d) Consideration of extensions shall take account of the candidate's personal circumstances and the nature of the research project, and consent shall neither be

unreasonably withheld nor given without good cause. All calculations will exclude any periods of suspension.

#### **4.4 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, shall be part of the record of 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 requires 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) Even where the student is not regularly attending the University, there shall be regular contact with, and reporting to, the supervisor.

Issues to consider in cases where candidates are not regularly attending the University are detailed at <https://intranet.victoria.ac.nz/research-office/postgraduate/forms-and-templates.html>

#### **4.6 Supervision and Supervisors**

##### **4.6.1 Appointment of Supervisors**

- (a) Each candidate will work under the guidance of at least one supervisor appointed on behalf of the University by the Head of School (HoS). The supervisor (or where there is more than one supervisor, 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. Exceptionally, people holding appointments such as research fellows or research associates providing they have been approved by the Associate Dean.
- (b) In some cases it may be appropriate for a scholar from outside the University to be appointed as another supervisor. In these cases, the HoS must make an appropriate recommendation to the Associate Dean, to be forwarded to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) for a decision.
- (c) 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](#). For guidelines and a template go to [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 enrolment.
- (d) Where the supervisory team for a student is changed for reasons such as conflict between the supervisor and the student, the former supervisor is not to be an internal examiner for the thesis.
- (e) The HoS 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.

#### **4.6.2 Qualifications and Training of Supervisors**

- (a) Only those academic staff with a Master's degree or doctorate in an appropriate subject area and/or evidence of an established research record should undertake the primary supervision of students and then only if they have appropriate experience or training. Heads of School have responsibility for ensuring that only qualified staff members gain approval as thesis supervisors and for advising staff to complete a professional development programme for supervisors.
- (b) New staff members must attend a professional development programme during their probationary period.
- (c) External supervisors should be invited to participate in an appropriate development programme as soon as possible after agreeing to serve in a supervisory capacity.

#### **4.6.3 Supervisors' Responsibilities**

The primary 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.

Full details and a Checklist for Supervision Administration are at <https://intranet.victoria.ac.nz/research-office/postgraduate/forms-and-templates.html>

#### **4.7 Responsibilities of the Student**

Completing a Master's 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;
- (f) to take responsibility for the final form of the thesis; and
- (g) to participate in University intellectual life.

Full details can be found at <https://intranet.victoria.ac.nz/research-office/postgraduate/forms-and-templates.html>

#### **4.8 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 research 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 formal 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 each year of enrolment. The intention is that not only should the supervisor see and acknowledge the comments written by the candidate, but the candidate should also see and acknowledge the comments written by the supervisor. The report template is at <https://intranet.victoria.ac.nz/research-office/postgraduate/forms-and-templates.html>
- (e) Heads of School (HoS) initiate 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 supervisor, 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 HoS before being submitted to the Associate Dean. A copy must be provided to the student. The report will then be placed in the student's file. 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 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 Education Coordinators and PGSA.

#### **4.9 Evaluating Supervision**

- (a) The six-monthly report provides a 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 Head of School at any time.
- (b) For serious or continuing problems, students should consult the Associate Dean.

#### **4.10 Appointment of Examiners**

- (a) The thesis is examined by two examiners who are people with standing in the field of the thesis being examined and who normally have experience of Master's supervision and examination. Usually at least one of these examiners will be a member of the staff of another university or similar institution (the external examiner), and the other examiner will be a member of the Victoria University staff (the internal examiner).
- (b) Examiners should not have played a supervisory role in the thesis. In exceptional circumstances, requests for a supervisor to act as an examiner will be assessed by the Research Degrees Committee (RDC). The RDC will rarely grant this request.
- (c) Prospective examiners should be approached informally by the supervisor or Head of School (HoS) well in advance of the expected submission of the thesis. This is to confirm that they are willing to examine and able to complete examination in the expected timeframe of 1 month. Candidates can be consulted on potential examiners, but must 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 RDC should be consulted.
- (e) The HoS, after appropriate consultation, shall recommend examiners to the Associate Dean who will, if satisfied, endorse this recommendation. The HoS is required to provide a brief curriculum vitae for the external examiner.

#### **4.11 Submission**

- (a) The decision to make an application for a thesis to be examined shall 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.
- (b) The University expects that normally a candidate would be enrolled for three months immediately preceding submission. Students may appeal to the Convener in exceptional circumstances.
- (c) 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.
- (d) A thesis is not complete unless it constitutes an independent 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 the supervisor before application is made for examination. This review period should not usually exceed two weeks.

- (f) If the supervisor is 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 a Master's degree. If the Associate Dean so decides, the candidate shall be advised of the reasons for the decision and the changes necessary to make the thesis suitable for examination.
- (h) Should the Associate Dean decide 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 retains the right to have the thesis examined.
- (i) The candidate shall submit two copies of the thesis to the Faculty Office and in addition, where required, an electronic copy. On submission of copies of the thesis, the candidate is required to 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 an "Availability of Thesis" form to indicate that the thesis may be consulted, borrowed, copied or reproduced in accordance with the Library regulations. Such consent may be 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 the [Withholding of Theses Procedure](#)).
- (j) On submission of the thesis, the Faculty Office will arrange for the candidate to submit an exit questionnaire.

## **4.12 Examination**

### **4.12.1 Examination Process**

- (a) The examination comprises an expert assessment of the thesis by two examiners, one of whom is external to the University (see 4.10 above).
- (b) Once the thesis is submitted to the Faculty Office, it will send a copy of the thesis to each examiner along with details of what is required. These details differ slightly from faculty to faculty.
- (c) Consultation between examiners or between an examiner and either the candidate or the supervisor is prohibited until the reports have been submitted to the Associate Dean.
- (d) Examiners' reports must be addressed in writing to the Associate Dean at the Faculty Office.
- (e) Each examiner is asked to provide a report on the thesis and to recommend a grade. The possible grades are listed below along with corresponding percentages for guidance (see the Assessment Handbook for further information):

A+	85%-100%
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A	80%-84%
A-	75%-79%
B+	70%-74%
B	65%-69%
B-	60%-64%
C+	55%-59%
C	50%-54%
D	40%-49%
E	Below 40%

*Note: for particular degrees, some faculties may also request a mark.*

Where the thesis is the sole piece of assessed work for the degree which can be awarded with distinction or merit the grades will correspond to the class of award as set out below:

Distinction	A+ or A
Merit	A- or B+
Pass	B, B-, C+ or C
Fail	D or E

- (f) Examiners may award the thesis one of the above grades. Where necessary, they may suggest editorial changes before the thesis is deposited in the library.
- (g) Where the thesis is of value but does not meet the requisite standards, they may suggest alterations to improve the grade but cannot do so without asking for the thesis to be resubmitted:
- (i) If the thesis is resubmitted, the candidate will be informed of the extent of the necessary corrections, and of a period within which the thesis must be resubmitted, which will not exceed six months for a full-time candidate.
  - (ii) If a thesis is resubmitted it will be re-examined by the same examiners unless there are exceptional circumstances.
  - (iii) For a resubmitted thesis only three grades are possible: C, D or E.
  - (iv) Resubmission for a second time is not permitted. This must be made clear to examiners marking a resubmitted thesis.
  - (v) No candidate may gain first or second class honours or distinction or merit (as appropriate for the degree for which the thesis has been submitted) for any degree for which the thesis has had to be resubmitted.
  - (vi) Since resubmission entails a further period of supervision, candidates will pay fees for the period of enrolment leading to a resubmission.
  - (vii) The University expects that normally a candidate would be enrolled for three months immediately preceding submission. Students may appeal to the Convener in exceptional circumstances.
- (h) On receipt of the reports, the Associate Dean sends the reports to the convener of the School Research Committee for a recommendation as to the outcome of the process.

#### **4.12.2 Processes for Determining the Final Grade**

- (a) The School Research Committee (SRC) is responsible for reviewing the examiners' reports and recommending an outcome of the examination to the Associate Dean.
- (b) Where the examiners are in agreement the SRC will usually accept their recommendation.
- (c) Where the examiners are not in agreement the SRC will discuss the grade and either ask the examiners to come to some agreement as to the final grade or, if the examiners cannot do this, institute some process for arriving at a decision which must involve:
  - (i) requesting a report from the supervisor in the light of the examiners' reports to help resolve any disagreement;

and may also involve:

- (ii) consulting with the relevant Associate Dean;
  - (iii) consulting with the Research Degrees Committee (RDC);
  - (iv) asking an external referee to adjudicate.
- (d) The committee will make a recommendation to the Associate Dean as to the final grade for the examination. Where examiners have recommended editorial changes to make the thesis acceptable, the SRC may make the completion of such changes a condition for the awarding of the degree, and should arrange for the changes to be checked and approved by an appropriate person.
- (e) On the basis of the SRC's recommendation the Associate Dean determines the final grade for the thesis and then:
  - (i) communicates the result to the candidate, and sends the candidate copies of the examiners' reports. It is expected that the examiners will attach their names to these reports and they will not be anonymous;
  - (ii) sends copies of the examiners' reports (if these have not already been distributed) and the result to the supervisor(s); and
  - (iii) informs the examiners of the outcome of the examination.
- (f) A decision taken by a Faculty concerning the grade awarded for a thesis may be appealed by the candidate or supervisor to the RDC of the University through the Research and Postgraduate Studies office.

#### **4.13 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, all copies of the thesis are returned to the candidate.

#### **4.14 Deposit of the Thesis in the Library**

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. The Faculty Office is responsible for ensuring that the candidate has deposited the required

copies in the Library. A copy of the receipt for this must be forwarded to the Faculty Office before the degree can be conferred.

#### **4.15 Notification of Results**

The official result is given in writing by the Associate Dean, or nominee, to the candidate.

#### **4.16 Conversion from a Master's Degree to a PhD**

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. They will then if necessary recommend the appointment of an additional supervisor who is also appropriately qualified and experienced. The student, primary supervisor and administrative supervisor 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.

## **5. References:**

[Academic Grievance Policy](#)

[Assessment Handbook](#)

[Awarding of Qualifications Posthumously Policy](#)

[Degree of Doctor of Philosophy Statute](#)

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

[Intellectual Property Policy](#)

[Recognition of Authorship Policy](#)

[Withholding of Theses Procedure](#)

[Library Statute](#)

Previous version: [archived Master's Thesis Policy 20071205](#)

## **6. Appendices:**

Refer to <https://intranet.victoria.ac.nz/research-office/postgraduate/forms-and-templates.html> for information formerly contained in appendices.

## **7. Approval Agency:**

Academic Board

## **8. Approval Dates:**

This policy was originally approved on: 31 August 2006

This version was approved on: 6 December 2007

This version takes effect from: 6 December 2007

This policy will be reviewed by: 6 December 2010

**9. Policy Sponsor:**

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)

**10. Contact Person:**

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

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