

Graduate Research Examinations Procedure - Nomination and Appointment of Examiners

Section 1 - Background and Purpose

- (1) This procedure outlines the conditions and processes for the nomination, approval and appointment of all examiners for higher degrees by research. The special procedures for the appointment of examiners for higher doctorates are outlined in the [Examination of Higher Doctorates Procedure](#).
- (2) Examiners are provided with separate instructions for the degree that they are examining.
- (3) The Board of Graduate Research has ultimate authority for the approval of all examiners for higher degree by research examinations.

Section 2 - Scope

- (4) Refer to the [Graduate Research Examinations Policy](#).

Section 3 - Policy Statement

- (5) Refer to the [Graduate Research Examinations Policy](#).

Section 4 - Procedure

Part A - Role of Examiners

- (6) Examiners are appointed to make an independent assessment of the quality of a thesis and any research artefacts in the practice-based mode of submission.

Part B - Number of Examiners

- (7) Two examiners are normally required to examine a master's by research or doctoral thesis.
- (8) Prior to commencement of the examination, as outlined in Part E below, supervisors are required to nominate a third examiner for each examination to provide for circumstances in which:
- the timelines for examination, as outlined in the Graduate Research Examination Procedures, have been exceeded by an examiner, or a first examiner is unable to examine the thesis for any reason, or
 - the recommended classifications of the first examiners are sufficiently divergent, as outlined in Section 8.3 of the Graduate Research Examination Procedures.

(9) If an examiner withdraws or declines an invitation before or while the examination is underway, supervisors may be required to nominate a further examiner.

Part C - Qualifications of Examiners

(10) All examiners must be external to La Trobe University. Adjunct staff of the University may not be appointed as examiners for a La Trobe University thesis.

(11) All examiners must normally hold an equivalent degree, or possess equivalent professional experience, to the degree they are examining and be internationally recognised experts in the research area of the thesis.

(12) At least one of the examiners of a doctoral thesis must be resident outside Australia unless the examination includes a requirement to attend an exhibition, performance or other event in person. To provide for circumstances in which a nominated international examiner may not proceed with the examination, two out of the three nominated examiners for a doctoral thesis must be resident outside Australia, unless approval has been given by the Chair BGR to do otherwise.

(13) Both the examiners of a Master's by research thesis may be Australian residents.

(14) Any nominations that do not meet these requirements must be accompanied by a case for the review and approval of the Chair BGR.

Part D - Avoiding Conflict of Interest in the Selection of Examiners

(15) A thesis must be examined without actual or perceived bias or preferential treatment. All thesis examiners must be independent of La Trobe University and conflicts of interest (COI) must be avoided:

- a. No one who has been a supervisor or an associate supervisor of the candidate, or who has been a member of a candidate's progress panel or in any way associated with the candidate's research project or associated work such as publications, shall be appointed as an examiner.
- b. No examiner may belong to the same department (or equivalent) of a university or institution as any other examiner of a given thesis.
- c. Normally any co-authors or any member of the research team may not be nominated as examiners. In smaller disciplines where this may be difficult to avoid, the principal supervisor must justify the selection of any co-author as an examiner.

(16) Any potential or perceived COI must be declared by the principal supervisor.

(17) If a COI is discovered during or after the examination, the Chair BGR may set aside one or both examiners' reports and a replacement examiner(s) will be appointed by the Chair.

Part E - Process for Selection and Endorsement of Examiners

(18) One month before the anticipated submission of the thesis (or at least three months in the case of practice-based degrees where an exhibition or performance is involved) the candidate submits a Notice of Intention to Submit form.

(19) The Graduate Research School (GRS) then sends an Appointment of Examiners form (AOE) to the principal supervisor.

(20) The principal supervisor will consult with the candidate in order to ascertain whether there are any conflicts of interest or other barriers with any known potential examiners who may be nominated. There is no obligation to nominate any particular examiners that candidates may recommend and the candidate will not be advised of the final

nominations (see Part H).

(21) The principal supervisor approaches nominees on an informal basis to see if they are prepared to be nominated.

(22) The principal supervisor completes the AOE form with the names of at least three examiners, which includes at least one more examiner than is needed in the first instance. Supervisors may indicate which of the nominations is their preferred reserve examiner, but should not communicate this to the nominees. Supervisors should also include justifications for any recommendations that do not meet the requirements outlined in Part C of these procedures.

(23) The principal supervisor submits the AOE form to the School Director of Graduate Research (SDGR) for endorsement, or the relevant Graduate Research Coordinator (GRC) where appropriate delegations have been given.

Part F - Appointment of and Contact With and Between Examiners

(24) The SDGR (or GRC as appropriate) returns the endorsed Appointment of Examiners form to the GRS.

(25) The Chair BGR reviews the nominations and approves the examiners to be officially invited in the first instance. In the case of a thesis with an exhibition, all three nominees, subject to meeting all the necessary criteria, will be invited to review the exhibition.

(26) From this point the candidate and members of the supervisory team must have no contact with examiners until the Board of Graduate Research has recommended an outcome. Where contact with an examiner has occurred, that examiner's report will be disregarded.

(27) When nominations are approved GRS will send official letters of invitation to the approved examiners:

- a. outlining the conditions of the examination,
- b. providing an estimated timing of the thesis submission and
- c. seeking information concerning any requirements for confidentiality beyond normal procedures (see Part H).

(28) Examiners must indicate their acceptance of the invitation to examine within the nominated time frame and confirm there is no conflict of interest with any member of the supervisory team or the candidate. Examiners must have no contact with each other in relation to the examination during the examination period.

(29) Where the submission of a thesis is delayed by more than one month from the date initially advised to examiners, the GRS will inform the approved examiners.

Part G - The Third Examiner

(30) In all cases when a third examiner is required (see clause 8) GRS will contact the third examiner to ascertain their availability to examine the thesis. Where the third examiner is unavailable or does not respond, GRS will contact any additional approved nominees or request additional nominees from the principal supervisor for approval from the Chair BGR.

(31) In circumstances where an examiner has been replaced by another examiner due to tardiness, and the original examiner's report is subsequently received, that report will be put aside and will only be considered should the examination warrant a third examiner according to Section 8.3 of the Graduate Research Examination Procedures. In all cases examiners will be advised of the status of their reports at the appropriate time.

Part H - Confidentiality of Examiners

(32) According to Section 13 of the Graduate Research Examination Procedures the identity of examiners will normally

be withheld from the candidate until a decision has been made by the Chair BGR in relation to the outcome of the examination.

(33) Wherever possible the confidentiality of the examination process must be maintained and the supervisors and examiners must not communicate during the examination process.

(34) Potential examiners must be informed that under Victorian legislation a candidate may request full details of their examination, including the examiners' names

(35) Where the Board of Graduate Research determines that (d) is the outcome of the examination, and this is communicated to the candidate and supervisor, the examiner(s) report will remain de-identified to protect the integrity of the anonymous examination process. In this case, the candidate will receive direction from a Graduate Research Advisory Panel and their supervisor in relation to amendments.

Section 5 - Definitions

(36) Nil.

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