Higher Doctorate Policy

Section 1 - Key Information

Policy Type and Approval Body	Academic – Academic Board
Accountable Executive – Policy	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation)
Responsible Manager – Policy	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research Training)
Review Date	22 July 2029

Section 2 - Purpose

(1) This Policy defines and sets out the procedures for the admission, examination, and award of the higher doctorate degrees offered by La Trobe University.

Section 3 - Scope

(2) This Policy and Procedure applies to:

a. all award higher doctorate courses offered by La Trobe University:
    i. Doctor of Laws (LLD)
    ii. Doctor of Letters (DLitt)
    iii. Doctor of Science (DSc)
b. all prospective and current enrollees for a higher doctorate degree; and
c. staff of the University and external persons involved in relevant decision-making processes; such as external examiners.

Section 4 - Key Decisions

Key decisions	Role
Approval for admission into higher doctorate	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) (DVC(R&I))
Appointment of examiners	Higher Doctorates Committee (HDC)
Approval for award of higher doctorate	Academic Board (AB)

Section 5 - Policy Statement

(3) A higher doctorate is the highest qualification of the University and may be awarded by the Academic Board to an enrollee for published work assessed by external examiners as representing an internationally recognised, significant and sustained original contribution to knowledge in one or more branches of learning, above the requirements of a

doctoral degree. This award is made in compliance with the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011, the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 and the Australian Qualifications Framework 2013.

(4) A person enrolled in a higher doctorate degree is not governed by the normal requirements expected of a graduate research candidate as outlined in the Graduate Research Candidature Policy, the Graduate Research Progress Policy, or the Graduate Research Supervision Policy.

Section 6 - Procedures

Part A - Degrees Awarded

(5) The type of higher doctorate degree awarded to a successful enrollee will depend on the discipline of the research.

Part B - Eligibility for Admission

(6) To be eligible for admission to this degree nominees must normally:

a. be a graduate of La Trobe University; or
b. have been a salaried member of the academic staff of the University for at least five years; or
c. have graduated from another educational institution and have demonstrated a substantial contribution to research at La Trobe University as an adjunct or honorary member of staff for at least five years.

Part C - Criteria for the Award

(7) A higher doctorate will be awarded for work that is an internationally recognised, significant and sustained original contribution to knowledge in one or more branches of learning.

(8) While nominees are formally admitted to and enrolled in the degree, there is no formal supervision, and there are no course or candidature requirements other than the submission of the work for examination.

Part D - Overseeing Committee

(9) The Higher Doctorates Committee (HDC) is a sub-committee of the Research and Graduate Studies Committee (RGSC).

(10) The HDC will be chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research Training). The membership and operations of the HDC will be as outlined in the Terms of Reference and in this procedure.

(11) If any member of the HDC has a perceived, potential or actual conflict of interest in relation to the nomination of enrolment in, or examination of a person in a higher doctorate, they must declare the conflict as soon as possible to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation). The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) will determine whether the conflict of interest requires the appointment of an alternative member.

(12) The HDC is responsible for:

a. the review of nominations and recommendations to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) for admission to the degree;
b. the appointment of examiners; and
c. recommendations to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) in relation to the outcome of a higher doctorate examination.

Part E - Nominations for Higher Doctorates

(13) The following officers of the University may recommend in writing to the Chair, HDC admission to the degree of an eligible person who has completed work considered by the nominators to be an internationally recognised, significant and sustained original distinguished contribution or contributions to knowledge in one or more branches of learning:

a. University Council members
b. the Vice-Chancellor
c. Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Provosts and Pro Vice-Chancellors
d. Deans of Schools

(14) Where the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research Training) submits a nomination for the degree, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) will appoint an alternative Chair, HDC.

(15) On receipt of a nomination for admission to the degree, the Chair, HDC will invite the nominee to submit the following to the HDC:

a. a detailed curriculum vitae and evidence of their eligibility for admission to the degree including copies of relevant testamurs;
b. a summary of their broad field of research;
c. a description of their achievements, including the nominee's view of the extent to which the work contributes to the advancement of knowledge;
d. a summary of the academic significance and impact of the material to be submitted for the degree and how it provides evidence of their achievements; and
e. any further documentation required by the Graduate Research School (GRS), for example formal acceptance of their nomination.

Part F - Admission to the Degree

(16) Upon receipt of a nomination for a higher doctorate, the HDC will determine whether in its opinion the work appears worthy of examination for the degree and if so shall formally recommend admission to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation).

(17) Where the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) submits a nomination for the degree, the recommendation from the HDC will be submitted to the Vice-Chancellor for approval.

(18) Nominees who have been approved for admission by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) or Vice-Chancellor will receive a letter of offer of admission to the degree from the Graduate Research School (GRS). The letter of offer will include:

a. the date for submission of the work for examination, which will normally be no later than six (6) months from the letter of offer; and
b. the requirements for submission, as outlined in this Policy.

(19) Nominees who have not been approved for admission will be advised formally in writing that they may reapply after three (3) years of the date of the letter if they have additional published outputs.

(20) Admitted enrollees who do not submit work for examination within twelve (12) months of receiving a letter of offer without approval from the Chair, HDC will normally be withdrawn from the degree.

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(21) Admitted enrollees will only be given an extension to their enrolment period beyond twelve (12) months in exceptional circumstances. Enrollees requesting an extension to their enrolment period should apply in writing to the Chair, HDC. The Graduate Research School (GRS) will action an extension to enrolment beyond twelve months following approval from the Chair, HDC.

(22) The Chair (HDC) may withdraw a nomination or offer where:

a. the nominee requests that their nomination be withdrawn; or
b. the nominee declines their offer of admission; or
c. it is determined that a nomination contains inaccurate, incomplete, fraudulent or misleading information; or
d. where a nominee or enrollee is excluded from any higher education institution or higher education program at any time.

Part G - Confirmation of Submission

(23) One month prior to the anticipated submission the enrollee will write to the GRS confirming the date of submission. At this time the enrollee will advise of any change in the work to be submitted from the overview provided prior to admission of the degree.

(24) The enrollee will be asked to supply the names of any examiners whom they do not wish to examine their submission.

(25) The GRS will provide instructions to the enrollee concerning the uploading of digital material (including durable records of artefacts) and the provision of any hard copies for examination.

(26) The GRS will send an Appointment of Examiners Form to the Chair, HDC seeking the nomination of examiners from the HDC.

Part H - Appointment of Examiners

(27) The HDC will appoint three examiners for the examination of a higher doctorate.

(28) Any examiners shall:

a. be professors of international standing, and shall be persons considered by the HDC to have special knowledge and competence in the branch of learning relevant to the degree;
b. be independent of La Trobe University;
c. have had no involvement with the enrollee, either through co-publication, co-grant authorship, or be currently employed at the same institution as the enrollee; and
d. not have been identified by the enrollee as unsuitable.

(29) The identity of examiners will normally be withheld from the enrollee until a decision has been approved by Academic Board, or an unsuccessful examination outcome is reached, in relation to the examination.

Part I - Submission for Examination

(30) A submission for a higher doctorate will normally consist of:

a. a summary of the published work being submitted, in chronological and/or thematic groupings where appropriate;
b. an outline of the enrollee’s contribution to the research and the published work where the work includes any

jointly-authored publications;

c. a statement confirming that the submission contains no work for which a degree has been awarded by La Trobe or any other university;
d. a statement describing whether any generative AI tools, or other editorial assistance, were used in the preparation of the submission and the extent of its use;
e. the published work and any appropriate framing material; and
f. a durable, digital record of any additional materials, such as catalogues, journals or research artefacts, if applicable.

(31) The published work and any supporting or framing material must be in English unless prior approval to submit material in another language has been granted by the Chair, HDC.

(32) Following confirmation of the availability of the examiners and any special requirements they may have, the GRS will provide the examiners with access to the submission together with guidelines for examination for the degree.

(33) Where any book(s) form part of the work to be submitted the nominee should provide digital copies of each for examination. If examiners request a hard copy of the book(s) the enrollee will be asked to provide hard copies.

Part J - Examination

(34) Examiners are required to submit independent reports within three months of receipt of the material and should not consult other examiners other than in exceptional circumstances, either following the approval of or at the request of the Chair, HDC.

(35) During the examination process, there should not be any direct contact between an examiner and the enrollee.

(36) Examiners will be asked to judge whether the body of work submitted by the enrollee has generated important debate, caused a change in theory or practice in the discipline, influenced scholars or practitioners in the field, or has made a substantial impact on society.

(37) Examiners will be asked to recommend either that:

a. the degree be awarded to the enrollee; or
b. the degree should not be awarded to the enrollee.

(38) The HDC may set aside an examination report when:

a. there is sufficient evidence of inadequate or poor quality in that examination;
b. there is a demonstrable bias that disadvantages the enrollee and brings the examination into question;
c. it has been found that the examiner does not meet the criteria for examiners as prescribed by this procedure; or
d. there is evidence of actions, such as collaboration between examiners or inappropriate communication with the enrollee, that may bring the examination into disrepute.

Part K - Outcome of Examination

(39) When the HDC has concluded its consideration of the examiners' reports it shall either recommend to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) that:

a. the degree should be awarded to the enrollee (Pass outcome); or
b. the degree should not be awarded to the enrollee (Fail outcome).

(40) The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) determines the outcome of the examination, based on the recommendation of the HDC.

(41) Where that determination is a pass outcome, RGSC considers the recommendation that the enrollee be awarded the higher doctorate. Where the recommendation is endorsed, RGSC will submit the recommendation to the Academic Board for approval.

(42) After approval by Academic Board, or an unsuccessful examination outcome is reached, the Graduate Research School (GRS) will advise the enrollee of the outcome and provide each report with the examiner's name.

(43) Enrollees who have been advised of an unsuccessful examination outcome will be advised formally in writing by the Graduate Research School (GRS) that they may reapply after three (3) years of the date of the letter of outcome, if they have additional published outputs.

Part L - Request for Review

(44) Enrollees who have received an unsuccessful outcome will be advised of their right for a review.

(45) Reviews may only be sought on procedural grounds related to the conduct of the examination and must be submitted to the University Ombudsman within twenty (20) business days of the date of the written advice of the examination outcome.

(46) Enrollees in higher doctorates are also eligible to lodge a complaint with the National Student Ombudsman at no cost. For further information on complaints considered by the National Student Ombudsman, go to Making a complaint | National Student Ombudsman (NSO).

(47) If the review is upheld the Chair, HDC will arrange for a re-examination of the work and will appoint new examiners where appropriate.

Part M - Graduation and Submission of Archival Version

(48) Following Academic Board approval, the Graduations Office will invite the enrollee to graduate. The University Events Office will make appropriate additional arrangements for a graduation ceremony in which a higher doctorate will be awarded.

(49) The work for which the degree was awarded will normally be made publicly available in the La Trobe University Institutional Repository where there are no restrictions on access to the work.

(50) The enrollee will be asked to:

a. complete an Access to Thesis - Consent form, provide copies of any relevant copyright agreements or restrictions on public access to the work and indicate any need for embargo for all or part of the work;
b. where any books form part of the submission, supply an additional hard copy for inclusion in the University Library Collection and a publisher's digital version, where these exist, for inclusion in the La Trobe University Institutional Repository; and
c. supply a citation to be read at the graduation or public award of the degree.

Section 7 - Definitions

(51) For the purpose of this Policy and Procedure:

a. Higher doctorate: An additional kind of doctoral degree, of higher standing than a PhD or professional

doctorate, which is awarded based on an internationally recognised original contribution to knowledge rather than through the process of supervised independent study.

Section 8 - Authority and Associated Information

(52) This Policy is made under the La Trobe University Act 2009.

Status and Details

Status	Current
Effective Date	3rd August 2026
Review Date	22nd July 2029
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Approval Date	3rd August 2026
Expiry Date	Not Applicable
Responsible Manager - Policy	Daniell Bendrups Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research Training)
Enquiries Contact	Graduate Research School

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