The role of Examiners in the thesis examination process for graduate research degrees

Australian graduate research degrees

1. Research Doctoral Degree (PhD)
   - typically 3.5 years in duration
   - a graduate makes a significant and original contribution to knowledge

2. Masters Degree (MPhil)
   - typically 1.5 years in duration
   - a graduate shows originality in the application of knowledge

Examination format

Unlike the examination systems of Britain, North America and Europe, it is less common in Australia to have an oral examination of a thesis and generally the examination is a formative process based only on written reports. However, some disciplines at The University of Queensland include an oral examination in addition to the written examination.

If the thesis being examined has both oral and written examination components, the examiner will be advised of this when they are invited to examine the thesis. The written reports must be sent directly to the Graduate School at least 48 hours prior to oral examination for the oral examination to proceed.

The submitted thesis

The thesis must not exceed 80,000 or 40,000 words for a PhD or MPhil, respectively. The word count includes all footnotes and appendices but excludes the reference list/bibliography.
The examination process

- At The University of Queensland, PhD and MPhil theses are examined by two examiners external to the University, it is expected at least one of whom is from outside of Australia.
- The candidate is aware of the examiners’ identity but is prohibited from making contact with the examiner until the requirements of the degree have been met.
- Examiners are not to contact the supervisors or the candidate during the examination.
- If any clarification on process or academic matters is required, all communication must be via the UQ Graduate School (thesis@gradschool.uq.edu.au).
- Each examiner independently submits a summary recommendation and detailed written report on the thesis.
- A written report is still required even if there is to be an oral examination. These reports are considered by the Dean of the Graduate School in determining an overall outcome for the thesis.
- If the recommendation is “no changes”, a report is still required in order to give feedback to the candidate on the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis.
- Where discipline specific knowledge is required to assist the Dean in reaching a decision on the outcome of the thesis, an academic staff member of the candidate’s enrolling unit provides academic input. This academic staff member is independent of the advisory team and is known as the Chair of Examiners. They are nominated prior to the thesis being sent out for examination.
- Where there is disparity between the reports of the two examiners, the Dean may determine that a third examiner be appointed.
- At the conclusion of the thesis examination process, the examiners will be advised of the final outcome of the thesis they have examined.

Criteria for examination

- Does the candidate demonstrate a significant and original contribution to knowledge (PhD candidates)?
- Does the candidate show originality in the application of knowledge (MPhil candidates)?
- Does the candidate engage with the literature and the work of others?
- Does the candidate show an advanced knowledge of research principles and methods relating to the applicable discipline?
- Is there a clear and discernable coherence in the presented research, its arguments and conclusions?
- Is the thesis clearly, accurately and cogently written?
**Thesis including publications**

As part of the thesis, a candidate may submit published work that contributes directly to the argument and supports their findings. The minimum requirement is that the work must have been carried out since the commencement of their candidature and submitted for publication, accepted or published during candidature.

Submitted papers must be clearly distinguished from work that has already been published or accepted for publication. When incorporating published work, the minimum requirements are:

- The scope and quality of the published work must be commensurate with the contribution to knowledge expected of a PhD or MPhil candidate.
- The thesis must contain an introduction that contextualises the research in relation to the present state of knowledge in the field.
- Thesis chapters must be in a logical and cogent sequence leading to an argument that supports the main findings of the thesis.
- There must be an independent and original general discussion included that is entirely the work of the candidate and that integrates the most significant findings of the thesis.
- Clear statements of authorship and contribution to each paper must be provided in the preliminary pages of the thesis.


**Reports**

The examiners’ reports are used for two purposes:

1. To inform the University of the appropriate outcome for the examination;
2. To give feedback to the candidate to guide them, if applicable, in making changes to the thesis to ensure it is of the highest possible standard for the award of the degree.

To fulfil these requirements a report should be sufficiently detailed and comprehensive and provide information on the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis.

The University of Queensland does not provide examiners with a template for their report due to discipline specific differences.
## Summary recommendation

The summary recommendation form outlines the possible thesis outcomes. To arrive at a final outcome of the thesis, the Dean takes into account both examiners reports, reviews any discrepancies in the reports and if required, consults with the Chair of Examiners. Recommendations available include:

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<th>Description of corrections required</th>
<th>Corrections to be reviewed by:</th>
<th>Further examination required?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>No changes</strong></td>
<td>Nil corrections however a report is still required in order to give feedback to the candidate.</td>
<td>N/A No</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Changes</strong></td>
<td>Changes required as indicated in examiners reports</td>
<td>Changes are made to the satisfaction of the Chair of Examiners and the Dean of the Graduate School No</td>
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| **Changes with review by examiner** | Changes required as indicated in examiners reports | • Changes are made to the satisfaction of the examiner, the Chair of Examiners and the Dean of the Graduate School.  
• The Dean may ask you to review the candidate’s changes. Note: This is not a re-examination of the thesis but an opportunity for you to check that the candidate has made the changes you requested or academically defended not making the changes.  
• Examiners are given two weeks to advise whether the changes are satisfactory. No |
| **Revise & Resubmit**               | The candidate will not be awarded the degree but will be allowed to resubmit a revised thesis after a further period of research, substantial organisation or reconceptualization. | The thesis will be re-examined by the original examiners (where possible). Yes |

*Please note that the option to fail a thesis is not given for a first examination.*

The summary recommendation form also asks examiners to rate the quality of the thesis in relation to other theses they have read at a similar level. Where examiners feel that the thesis is one of the best they have read (top 10%) and makes an outstanding contribution to the field, they may nominate the candidate to be considered for the Dean’s Award for Outstanding RHD Theses. Further information about the Dean’s Award can be found at [http://www.uq.edu.au/grad-school/deans-award](http://www.uq.edu.au/grad-school/deans-award).
Payment for examiners

UQ is grateful to examiners for the significant contribution they make to the quality of UQ research as external reviews of RHD theses. As such, UQ examiners are paid for this contribution approximately 4 weeks after receipt of the examiner’s report. Payment amounts are recommended by Universities Australia and will be paid into your nominated bank account.

1. International examiners
Payments will be made by direct funds transfer in the currency of your choice. If no currency is chosen, you will be paid in your local currency. For successful payment, we require the following banking details:
   • bank name
   • bank street address (PO boxes not accepted)
   • account holders name
   • account number
   • bank SWIFT code
   • IBAN code (European accounts only)

2. Domestic examiners
Examiner payments are not subject to PAYG, and they are exempted from tax. The full amount will be deposited directly into the account you specified on the form.
   • Payment by Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT)
     Approximately 4 weeks after receipt of your examiners report, payment will be paid into your nominated bank account.
   • Payment by invoice
     Examiners who wish to have monies paid to their institution can have their institution invoice UQ for the required amount.
Further information for examiners can be found on the Graduate School website at http://www.uq.edu.au/grad-school/examiners

Information in this guide is based on the policy document Framework for Best Practice in Doctoral Examination in Australia by the Council of Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies in Australia and the Australian Qualifications Framework 2011.

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