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# Guidelines for Examiners of theses submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

# 2008



# Guidelines for Examiners of theses submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

These Guidelines detail the procedures for examinations for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at The University of Auckland for candidates registered under the 2008 Statute.

They are intended for the guidance of those who have been appointed as examiners, and for others involved with the examination of a PhD at The University of Auckland.

Information regarding the PhD Statute (2008), thesis presentation, PhD procedures, and this document can be accessed online at [www.auckland.ac.nz/postgraduate](http://www.auckland.ac.nz/postgraduate) under the Policies and Guidelines menu item.

In the event of any conflict between the PhD Statute and this guide, the provisions of the Statute will prevail.

**Enquiries:**  
School of Graduate Studies  
Graduate Centre  
ClockTower – East Wing  
22 Princes Street  
Auckland

Phone +64 9 373 7599 ext 86899

Fax +64 9 373 7610 (external),  
ext 84310 (internal)

Email: [postgraduate@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:postgraduate@auckland.ac.nz)

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# What Standard is Required?

The following extract, from Clause 1 of the Statute for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (2008), details the criteria on which the examination process is to be based:

## Clause 1

- c Upon completion of an approved programme of research, the PhD will be awarded to a candidate:
  - (i) whose submitted thesis meets the requirements set out in Clause 1d
  - and
  - (ii) who has satisfied the examiners in an oral examination and any other examination that may be required on the subject of the thesis and on relevant matters in the field or fields to which the subject belongs.
- d The PhD degree is awarded for a formal and systematic exposition of a coherent programme of advanced research work carried out over the period of registration for the degree which in the opinion of the examiners and the Board of Graduate Studies satisfies all of the following criteria:
  - (i) to be an original contribution to knowledge or understanding in its field
  - and
  - (ii) to meet internationally recognised standards for such work
  - and
  - (iii) to demonstrate a knowledge of the literature relevant to the subject and the field or fields to which the subject belongs, and the ability to exercise critical and analytical judgment of it
  - and
  - (iv) to be satisfactory in its methodology, in the quality and coherence of its written expression, and in its scholarly presentation and format.

# Who are the Examiners?

The Board of Graduate Studies appoints two external examiners to examine the candidate's thesis and to provide it with reports and recommendations for its consideration. The relevant provisions of the Statute and Guidelines are as follows.

Each examiner should hold a doctoral degree or have equivalent expertise and experience, and be expert in the field of study which is the subject of the thesis. One examiner (the Oral Examiner) must be able to attend the oral examination and will normally be resident in New Zealand or Australia. At least one examiner should be from outside New Zealand.

The examiners may not be staff members of the University or have been involved in either the thesis research or the preparation of the thesis. However it is not the intention of this provision to exclude the appointment of examiners who have had a minor consultative role on some aspects of the candidate's research.

It is expected that the examiners will prepare and submit their reports independently of each other and that there will be no communication between examiners about the thesis during the reporting process. Neither the supervisors nor the candidate may communicate with the examiners regarding the examination at any stage of the examination process.

# Examiners' Reports and Recommendations

Each examiner is to be provided with a copy of the thesis and is asked to provide the School of Graduate Studies, within six to eight weeks of receipt of the thesis, with a written report in English on the quality of the thesis according to the criteria outlined above.

Examiners are requested to exercise due care and professional judgement in assessing the extent to which the thesis meets, or fails to meet, these requirements, and to avoid being unduly prejudiced against an argument with whose conclusions they may not necessarily agree.

In the case of a resubmitted thesis, the examination should be of the whole thesis as it is now written. The examination is not to see whether satisfactory revisions have been made, but to decide whether the thesis as a whole now satisfactorily meets the criteria above.

Each report must contain one of the following recommendations;

## Clause 9

h The examiners will include with their reports one of the following recommendations:

- (i) To award the degree.

The thesis can be passed without any further amendment or correction. Sometimes examiners may wish to include a list of suggested amendments for the candidate to use when publishing the material.

or

- (ii) To award the degree after specified minor corrections have been made to the thesis to the satisfaction of the Oral Examiner or Nominee, who may be the Main Supervisor, by a specified date.

This recommendation can be made when the thesis has reached the required standard but for minor problems such as inconsistency in terminology, referencing problems, or typographical errors. When these are corrected, the thesis will meet the standard and then will be ready for permanent binding and placement in the Library.

or

- (iii) (a) To award the degree subject to revising part or parts of the thesis to the satisfaction of the Oral Examiner or Nominee, who will be the Head of Department, by a specified date.

This recommendation is made when the Examiner concludes that the revisions required are not minor, but are substantive including re-analysis of data, or rewriting of chapters, or corrections of significant lapses in logic or coherence. The nature of the revisions must be such that, when the Head of Department acts as the nominee of the Oral Examiner, he or she can certify that compliance has been achieved. In such cases, the Head of Department

may discuss the revisions with the Head of Department Nominee on the Examination Committee and/or Main Supervisor. These changes can normally be made within a 3-6 month period.

or

- (b) To award the degree subject to revising part or parts of the thesis to the satisfaction of the Examiner by a specified date.

This recommendation is made when the Examiner concludes that the revisions required are not minor, but are substantive including re-analysis of data, or rewriting of chapters, or corrections of significant lapses in logic or coherence. The nature of the revisions must be such that subject-specific knowledge is required and the Examiner wishes to see and approve the changes. These changes can normally be made within a 3-6 month period.

or

- (iv) To permit the candidate to revise the thesis and resubmit it for examination on one further occasion only.

This recommendation is made when the Examiner concludes that the thesis is not yet of PhD standard. It will require either further research, rewriting of specific sections, reconceptualisation, and/or reorganisation in order to reach the required PhD standard. The candidate will be permitted to resubmit, normally within a 12 month period.

or

- (v) Not to award the degree.

This recommendation is made when the Examiner is of the opinion that the thesis has substantive flaws incompatible with the requirements of a PhD.

The Board of Graduate Studies relies on the examiners' reports as a means of assessing whether or not the criteria listed in Clause 1 have been met. Reports should therefore address these criteria specifically and also summarise the nature of the achievements and/or deficiencies in what the candidate has written. Lists of typographical errors, while welcome, are not expected.

If the recommendation is to revise under (iii) or (iv), then it is important to give clear reasons for this and also to indicate the issues which should be addressed and/or the nature and extent of any improvements needed to make the thesis acceptable.

If the recommendation is to award the degree, or to award with minor corrections, then it is helpful to suggest questions which might be put at the oral examination. Suggestions for improvements to the research which might assist in future work or publication are also welcome.

# Submitting Reports

The written reports and recommendations should be signed and submitted to the School of Graduate Studies (at the address given on the first page). A fax or email is satisfactory in the first instance provided that the signed original is subsequently received.

The University seeks to complete the examining process for a candidate within four months of the date of submission and so expects examiners to submit their reports within 6–8 weeks of receiving the thesis. To ensure that each thesis receives the careful and thorough examination it deserves, it is also important that examiners are not put under undue pressure to produce reports within a short space of time.

All approaches to an examiner concerning submission of a report must be made through the School of Graduate Studies. If some unforeseen delay appears likely, the School of Graduate Studies should be informed.

If a report has not been received within 8 weeks, the School of Graduate Studies will send a reminder to the examiner and advise him or her that unless the report is received within two further months the appointment as examiner will lapse. If the report has not been received within two months of the date of the reminder, the Board of Graduate Studies may appoint a replacement examiner.

Examiners are not required to return theses that were submitted in temporary binding (soft bound) for examination purposes only. All other theses should be returned by mail to the School of Graduate Studies once all necessary reports have been made.



# Consideration of Reports

The Board of Graduate Studies also appoints an Examination Committee with faculty and departmental representatives.

The School of Graduate Studies sends the reports of examiners to the Examination Committee in the first instance. This Committee also considers any submission made by the supervisor/s prior to examination on the outcome or context of the research.

Examiners' reports are also sent to the supervisor/s on a confidential basis, and they may comment on them in writing to the Examination Committee.

If there is disagreement between examiners, the Examination Committee may seek further clarification from examiners, and may also ask them to consult with each other and report in writing on the outcome.

The Examination Committee then makes a report to the Board of Graduate Studies which includes the nature and outcome of any communications with the examiners and/or supervisor/s and which recommends one of the following:

## Clause 9k

- (i) to appoint one or more further independent Examiners to report on any areas of conflict,  
or
- (ii) to proceed to the Oral Examination,  
or
- (iii) to permit the candidate to revise the thesis and resubmit it for examination on one further occasion only,  
or
- (iv) not to award the degree.

In the event that the examiners' reports are in serious conflict the Board of Graduate Studies may appoint further independent external examiners to report on any matters which it may specify.

# Confidentiality of Reports

Prior to the oral examination the candidate should not be informed of the identity of the examiners.

As suppliers of evaluative material in terms of the Privacy Act 1993, the information and reports supplied by examiners will be held in confidence to supervisors and to persons involved in the formal examination process. However, the University would prefer to be able to release reports to candidates at the conclusion of the examination process, and also to use the reports for the purpose of judging the University's Best Doctoral Thesis Prizes. The University therefore requests examiners to consider waiving the confidentiality of reports. No reports will be released unless all examiners have agreed to this.

Where resubmission is required, the Examination Committee will be asked to provide the candidate with appropriate information extracted from the reports in a manner that preserves the confidentiality of the examiners.

Under New Zealand law, any person may request a statement of reasons for a decision made about them. This includes decisions of an academic nature. If a candidate requests a statement of reasons for the decision to award or not to award the degree, then the Head of Department will be asked to prepare a brief paper which outlines the points of agreement of the examiners. This paper must preserve any confidentiality of the examination reports and should demonstrate that the decision of the University was based on the recommendations of the examiners as a whole, and not on the views of an individual examiner.

# The Oral Examination

An oral examination must be held at some stage. In the event that the Board of Graduate Studies accepts a recommendation to proceed to an oral examination, the following procedures apply.

## Clause 9m

- (i) The Head of Department will arrange this examination.
- (ii) The Board of Graduate Studies, on the recommendation of the Head of Department, will appoint a person to act as an Independent Chair of the oral examination. The Chair must be a member of the academic staff of the University, but will not normally be a member of a faculty in which the candidate is registered. For advice to Chairs of Oral Examinations, please refer to Appendix I.
- (iii) The examination must be attended by the candidate, the Oral Examiner, the Chair and the Head of Department Nominee on the Examination Committee. Please refer to Appendix II for guidelines for HoD Nominees.
- (iv) The School of Graduate Studies will forward copies of the examiners' reports to the Supervisor/s. The Main Supervisor may attend the oral examination, but will not act as an examiner and may only participate to the extent requested by the Chair.
- (vi) During the oral examination the Oral Examiner and Head of Department Nominee will discuss with the candidate the subject of the thesis and relevant matters in the field or fields to which the subject belongs. The Oral Examiner will discuss with the candidate issues raised in the examiners' reports and ask questions of the candidate on behalf of the other examiner.

The oral examination is held in private and it is not the practice of the University to have persons present other than those mentioned above.

No part of the examiners' reports, summaries or notes should be given to the candidate in advance of the examination, nor should candidates be given prepared oral questions in advance.

## Clause 9n

On completion of the oral examination, the Chair will provide a written report and recommendation, endorsed by the Head of Department Nominee and the Oral Examiner, to the Board of Graduate Studies. The report will include one of the following recommendations:

either

- (i) to award the degree

or

- (ii) to award the degree after specified minor corrections have been made to the thesis to the satisfaction of the Oral Examiner or nominee, who may be the Main Supervisor, and by a specified date

or

- (iii) (a) to award the degree subject to revising part or parts of the thesis to the satisfaction of the Oral Examiner or Nominee, who will be the Head of Department, by a specified date

or

- (b) to award the degree subject to revising part or parts of the thesis to the satisfaction of the Examiner or Examiners by a specified date

or

- (iv) to permit the candidate to revise the thesis and resubmit it for examination on one further occasion only, but only if the candidate has not already been permitted to revise and resubmit under Clause 9k (iii)

or

- (v) not to award the degree.

Unless points raised by the External Examiner have not been satisfactorily answered by the candidate, it would not normally be necessary for this examiner to be contacted prior to the completion of the oral report.

In the case of recommendation (iii) and (iv), the report must also state clearly the nature of the revisions recommended.

The candidate may be advised of the panel's recommendation. However, the Chair must make clear to the candidate that the result is provisional and the final outcome shall be determined by the Board of Graduate Studies.

# Revision and Resubmission

In the case of revision and resubmission, either prior to or after an oral examination, the following provisions apply:

## Clause 9o

- (i) If an oral examination has already been held, a copy of the report of the oral examination will be sent to the Examination Committee.
- (ii) The Examination Committee will agree on the date by which the thesis is to be resubmitted and the nature of the revisions recommended, and will convene a meeting with the candidate and supervisors to discuss these revisions. Both the revisions and the date are then to be reported in writing by the Chair of the Examination Committee to the Graduate Centre for approval by the Board of Graduate Studies and formal communication to the candidate. The date of resubmission may not be more than 12 months from the date of the oral examination or, in the case of a recommendation under Clause 9k(iii), not more than 12 months from the date the examiners' reports were forwarded to the Examination Committee by the Graduate Centre.
- (iii) The candidate is required to enrol and pay the prescribed tuition and research fees from the month in which the decision was made to the month by which the thesis is to be resubmitted. The registration of the candidate is to continue under the conditions applying at the first date of submission.
- (iv) If the thesis is not resubmitted by the prescribed date, the registration of the candidate will normally be terminated.
- (v) Upon resubmission, the revised thesis is to be examined as a whole by the same examiners in accordance with the provisions of this Clause, excepting that a further resubmission may not be recommended and that the Examination Committee may recommend that a second oral examination not be held. If one or both of the original examiners is unavailable to re-examine the thesis the Board of Graduate Studies will appoint alternative examiners.
- (vi) Upon receipt of both of the examiners' reports, the Graduate Centre will provide copies of the new examiners' reports, the original examiners' reports and the oral examination (if held) to the Examination Committee and to the supervisor/s on a confidential basis. The procedure followed by the Examination Committee will be that in Clause 9j. Following consideration of all examiners' reports the Examination Committee will make a report to the Board of Graduate Studies which includes the nature and outcome of any communications with the examiners and/or supervisor/s made under Clause 9j. In the case where an oral examination has not already been held the Examination Committee report must recommend that either an oral examination be held or the degree not be awarded. In the case where an oral examination has previously been held the Examination Committee report must recommend one of the following:
  - (a) to proceed to a second oral examination
  - or
  - (b) to award the degree

or

(c) to award the degree after specified minor corrections have been made to the thesis to the satisfaction of the Oral Examiner or Nominee, who may be the Main Supervisor, by a specified date

or

(d) not to award the degree.

# Payment of Fees and Reimbursement of Expenses

Payment of examiners' fees will be made once all the examiners' reports are received. Air tickets and taxi vouchers can be made available to oral examiners before the oral examination if requested, or reimbursement of travelling expenses (to scale) in connection with the oral examination will be made on receipt of proof of expenses.

The University of Auckland will pay for the return airfare between the Oral Examiner's residence and Auckland, as well as for any other travel expenses such as taxi fares or car parking costs. For reimbursement to occur, receipts need to be provided. In certain cases, the University will also provide one night's accommodation and meals. If necessary, this can be arranged by the School of Graduate Studies. No reimbursements will be made for accommodation or travel expenses incurred without the prior approval of the School of Graduate Studies.

Examiners will be paid a further fee if they are requested to re-examine a resubmitted thesis.

# Appendix I:

## Guide to Independent Chairs as to the Procedure for the Oral Examination at The University of Auckland

The following guide should be read in conjunction with The University of Auckland Statute for the Degree under which the candidate is registered.

1. At least ten days before the oral examination, the candidate will be advised by the Head of Department or Supervisor as to the format of the oral examination and whether or not some kind of presentation is expected. Candidates who wish to use presentation software or overheads should ensure that this is acceptable to the examining panel by discussing this with the HoD and/or Supervisor. The HoD and the Supervisor are able to give guidance as to what is usual in the candidate's discipline. The presentation should be no more than ten to fifteen minutes long. The HoD is responsible for ensuring that the presentation equipment is set up.
2. The candidate may not see the examiners' reports prior to the oral examination.
3. Twenty to thirty minutes before the oral examination, the Chair should meet with the HoD Nominee and Oral Examiner to discuss the examiners' reports and process for the oral examination. This meeting should establish the roles of the panel members, the allocation of questions (although it is expected that once discussion is underway the questions will flow naturally with some form of order), and the options as to the outcome. The Chair should ensure that questions or issues in the report(s) of the External Examiner(s) will be covered. The Supervisor may be invited to attend this meeting to ensure s/he is fully briefed.
4. The Chair should check that the room is properly set up to ensure the comfort of the candidate.
5. At the commencement of the examination, the Chair will introduce the panel members and explain their roles. The oral examination usually lasts between one and two hours. Where it is necessary to continue beyond this, the Chair should ensure breaks are taken after no more than two hours.
6. During the oral examination the Chair should ensure proper procedure is followed. The Chair should be wary of statements which may pre-judge the outcome.
7. Once the examiners are satisfied that they have adequately covered the issues in the written reports and any other matters of concern and interest, they will signal their readiness for closure to the Chair. The candidate may also be offered the opportunity to ask questions of the examiners.
8. At the close, the Chair will indicate that the examination has finished and the candidate will be asked to leave the room. The panel will then discuss the examination. The Chair may invite the Supervisor to be present for this discussion.
9. The candidate may be invited back into the room and advised of the panel's recommendation. However, the Chair must make clear to the candidate that the result is provisional and the final outcome shall be determined by the Board of Graduate Studies.
10. If the recommendation is to require that the candidate make minor corrections, revise part or parts of the thesis, or revise and resubmit, the Chair may take the opportunity to advise the candidate



and the Supervisor about the nature of these corrections and/or revisions or to explain how the candidate will be advised about these corrections and/or revisions at a later date.

11. The Chair will draft a report and recommendation. This should be endorsed by the HoD Nominee and Oral Examiner on the same day if possible, and sent to the Graduate Centre. It is the Chair's responsibility to ensure a process is in place to communicate required changes to the candidate, and that the Graduate Centre is advised of the process.
12. The Graduate Centre will then formally advise the candidate of the outcome.

# Appendix II

## Guidelines for the HoD Nominee in the Doctoral Examination Process

The HoD Nominee is a member of the Examination Committee (along with the HoD and the Associate Dean (Postgraduate) for the Faculty): “This person will have thorough knowledge of the general field of the thesis, but not necessarily of the thesis topic, and will normally be a staff member of the University” (PhD Statute Clause 9e(iii)).

The role of the HoD Nominee is to provide disciplinary and department-specific representation across the examination process.

Specifically, the HoD Nominee should contribute to the doctoral examination process (as described in Clause 9 of the relevant PhD Statute) in the following ways:

### Before the oral:

- Contribute to the decision-making of the Examination Committee.
- Read enough of the thesis to know its main purpose and findings (but *not* as an examiner).
- Read both examiners’ reports thoroughly.
- Read with care portions of the thesis that are subject to specific comments in the examiners’ reports.
- Bring contextual information forward from the Examination Committee to guide the Independent Chair in the process of the oral examination.

### During the oral:

- Assist the Independent Chair in ensuring that all the external examiner’s questions get addressed.
- May ask questions on behalf of the examiners where invited.
- May ask general questions from the field ie, “discuss with the candidate the subject of the thesis and relevant matters in the field or fields to which the subject belongs” (PhD Statute 9m(v)).

### At the conclusion of the oral:

- Endorse the Independent Chair’s report and recommendation, usually on the grounds of a valid process rather than for substantive reasons (the latter being the purview of the Oral Examiner).
- In the event of a ‘revise and resubmit’ outcome, ensure the Examination Committee understands the requirements that the student must meet.
- In the event of ‘minor changes’, ensure the Supervisor understands the requirements that the student must meet.



**THE UNIVERSITY  
OF AUCKLAND**

**SCHOOL OF  
GRADUATE STUDIES**

**Postal Address**

School of Graduate Studies  
The University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland  
New Zealand

**Contact**

School of Graduate Studies  
Graduate Centre  
ClockTower - East Wing  
22 Princes Street, Auckland  
Phone: +64 9 373 7599 ext 86899  
Fax: +64 9 373 7610  
Email: [postgraduate@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:postgraduate@auckland.ac.nz)  
[www.postgrad.auckland.ac.nz](http://www.postgrad.auckland.ac.nz)