



Notes for Examiners of Professional Doctorates in Nursing, Midwifery & Health

References: Doctoral Regulations section 4.12; Doctoral Procedures section 10

The Doctor of Health, the Doctor of Nursing, and the Doctor of Midwifery are professional (or named) doctorates undertaken by health professionals with more than five years of experience in their respective field. Each has a credit value of 360 points, which is equivalent to three years of full-time study. The course of study consists of:

- Part 1: Four compulsory courses (total 120 points)
- Part 2: Thesis (240 points)

Graduates of the Professional Doctorate programmes will be well-prepared as independent critical thinkers to develop and deliver evidence-informed services to meet the health needs of Aotearoa, New Zealand. With the programme's unique approach to developing research knowledge alongside an area of disciplinary/professional specialisation, the focus on professional practice is vital. As existing lead health practitioners and professionals, graduates will have acquired the knowledge and skills to address contemporary issues challenging the health sector whilst leading change in the working environment to influence local, national and potentially international health policy and practice.

After completing a postgraduate diploma or Master's degree, the candidates for these doctorates undertake an additional taught component (Part 1) taking place over 24 months part-time, followed by a thesis component (Part 2). This doctoral degree is awarded for a thesis demonstrating the candidate's **ability to carry out independent research, demonstrate critical insight**, and constitute a **significant and original contribution** to knowledge into the standard of a Doctoral Degree (i.e. a PhD). Furthermore, the outcomes should contribute to the **professional context**.

While a thesis for a professional doctorate may be shorter (70,000 words maximum) than a PhD thesis (100,000 words maximum), this is commensurate with a lower credit value (240 points rather than 360 points). The thesis should demonstrate the candidate's ability to:

- Engage in high-quality, independent research and inquiry into their own practice and contribute original knowledge to improving health-related practice, systems and policy;
- Engage with relevant current research and analysis to investigate and reflect on their own and others' professional contexts;
- Demonstrate advanced research skills and knowledge that are relevant to professional practice;
- Design and carry out independent research that contributes to their professional field.

The thesis must be clearly, accurately and cogently written and documented in a suitable scholarly manner. It should reveal a capacity to relate the research topic to the broader framework of knowledge in the disciplinary area in which it falls, contribute to the relevant professional practice context, and there should be an appropriate balance between the different parts of the thesis.

The thesis must be a single, integrated report. If the research consists of discrete studies, their relationship must be demonstrated. The thesis may include published material, provided that the research has been conducted under supervision during the period of enrolment for the professional doctorate.

For further guidance, please read these regulations <https://www.wgtn.ac.nz/documents/policy/research-policy/doctoral-regulations.pdf> (See sections 4.3.2 and 4.12).

About the examiners

A Professional Doctoral thesis is examined by three examiners who are people with standing in the field of study:

- The 'Internal Examiner' is most often an academic member of Victoria University of Wellington. The Internal Examiner will be present in person at the oral defence and will usually oversee the Candidate's corrections and amendments following the oral.
- The 'New Zealand Examiner' (sometimes called the 'External Examiner'), is usually from a university or institution within New Zealand, but may be from Australia or another country within a reasonable time difference of New Zealand. They are expected to attend the oral defence via video conference (unless they are in Wellington on the day, in which case they can attend in person).
- The 'Overseas Examiner' will normally be a member of an overseas university or similar institution. The intention behind this is to establish a common standard between New Zealand and overseas scholarship, and to preserve the international standing of our University's PhD degree. The Overseas Examiner is not usually expected to attend the oral defence, but is asked to provide a set of questions to be asked at the oral on their behalf. These questions are not shared with the Candidate ahead of their oral defence, so please do not include them within your report.

Conflicts of interest

The appointment of examiners is subject to the University's Conflicts of Interest Statute

<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/documents/policy/staff-policy/conflicts-of-interest-statute.pdf> Current or former supervisors, or researchers who have co-published with the candidate, may not be appointed as examiners. If during the examination process you discover a potential conflict of interest, or any other problem, please inform the Dean FGR neil.dodgson@vuw.ac.nz.

Examiners must not communicate with the candidate except through the Faculty of Graduate Research (FGR) before the completion of the examination process. Any consultation between examiners and supervisors must be conducted through the Dean FGR.

Where the thesis is embargoed prior to submission for examination, you will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement.

The examiner's report

Examiner's Report & Recommendation Form

Each examiner is asked to return an examination report and a signed Recommendation Form to the Doctoral Examination Team by the agreed due date (usually within 8 weeks of receiving the thesis).

The Recommendation Form

The Examiners Recommendation Form is a confidential recommendation to the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Research and is not shared with the student. Please do not include the recommendation in your report on the thesis. This form also invites you to make a confidential recommendation as to whether or not you consider the thesis is of sufficient merit to be considered for inclusion in the Dean's List.

If you wish to comment on issues not specifically related to the thesis but of concern to you, such as supervision or resource matters, please do so in a separate confidential report addressed to the Dean FGR.

The Examiner's Report

There is no set format for these reports, although they are typically of at least 3–4 pages in length and are expected to provide the Candidate with constructive feedback. In addition to that feedback, the Dean would appreciate your comments on the following:

- the extent to which the Candidate has demonstrated originality, critical insight and the capacity to carry out independent research.

- The extent of the contribution to knowledge made by the thesis, and in particular its contribution to the understanding of the subject with which it deals.
- The suitability of the material contained in the thesis for publication.

Where revisions are called for, you are encouraged to be very specific about those revisions that you feel are crucial to the acceptability of the thesis, bearing in mind that a specific set of revisions will be agreed upon by the Examination Committee present at the oral defence.

Examiners' reports must be independent. Consultation among examiners before their reports have been submitted is not permitted. In cases where examiners make differing recommendations in their reports, the Dean may require consultation to occur before the oral defence.

Any part of your report that you do not want released to the candidate or a third party should be submitted in a separate document and marked "Confidential to the Examiners". The University is subject to the provisions of the Official Information Act and the Privacy Act. Opinion from both the Ombudsman and the Privacy Commissioner indicates that your report may be considered personal information about the Candidate. The Candidate could request access to it under the Official Information Act. If such a request is made, the University must establish whether or not there is a reason to withhold the examiner's report under the provisions of the relevant Act.

About the Oral Defence

An oral defence is a mandatory part of the examination process at Victoria University of Wellington. The oral examination will usually be conducted by the New Zealand and Internal examiners under an independent chair and questions provided by the Overseas Examiner will be presented to the Candidate. In certain circumstances, the Dean may invite the Overseas Examiner to be involved via video conference, however, overseas examiners are still required to submit questions in writing. The primary supervisor will normally be in attendance but is not part of the examining panel and will not be present during the examiners' deliberations about the outcome of the oral defence.

Progression to the oral defence is not automatic but requires scrutiny of all reports by the Dean. As noted above, further consultation with examiners may sometimes be necessary before the oral can be approved. At such time, anonymised reports will be circulated among the examiners.

A time and date for the oral defence will be arranged by FGR shortly after the thesis is sent out to examiners. The arrangements are made well in advance because we understand the constraints on examiners' schedules. This date is provisional until the Dean has approved the oral, after considering the three examiners' reports, and the setting of a provisional date does not in any way imply an expectation of a particular outcome.

Distribution of reports

Once the decision to proceed to oral has been confirmed, all examiners' reports will be made available simultaneously to the Candidate, the supervisor/s and other examiners, at least five working days prior to the oral. Reports will be released with the names of the examiners. The Candidate will not receive a copy of the examiners' recommendations, however, the comments, suggestions and overall assessment of the thesis will indicate matters that may arise in the oral defence.

Amendments or revisions and confirmation of results

The examination panel will determine, at the oral defence, what corrections or amendments the candidate is required to make to the thesis before the degree can be awarded. These will be documented by the panel and conveyed to the candidate. Approval of such corrections is managed by the School and usually delegated to the Internal Examiner. If a candidate is required to revise and resubmit the thesis for a second examination, they will need to complete the revisions under supervision. The Dean FGR will confirm the overall recommendation of the examination panel.