

Notes for Examiners of PhD Theses

Reference: Doctoral Regulations for PhD and other Doctorates with Theses 4.12.1 and Doctoral Procedures 10.0

Thank you for agreeing to examine a Victoria University of Wellington PhD candidate's thesis. Here is some information on the doctoral examination process at Victoria University. For further information please email the Thesis Examinations Team at FGR Exams fgr-exams@vuw.ac.nz.

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About the examiners

A PhD 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 with a similar time zone to 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. 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 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 in your report.

Conflicts of interest

The appointment of examiners is subject to the University's [Conflicts of Interest Statute](#). 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 of the Faculty of Graduate Research (FGR) neil.dodgson@vuw.ac.nz.

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

Confidentiality

It is expected that examiners will consider the thesis confidential during the examination process and will not share the thesis following the examination without permission from the Candidate. A thesis that contains commercially sensitive information may be embargoed prior to submission to protect the intellectual property within. In this situation, the Thesis Examinations Team will ask you to sign and return a non-disclosure agreement before they send you the thesis.

Expectations of a doctoral thesis

The PhD degree is awarded for a thesis which demonstrates the candidate's **ability to carry out independent research** and to **demonstrate critical insight**, and which constitutes a **significant and original contribution** to knowledge or understanding within a field of study. The contribution to knowledge and level of originality should be consistent with three to four years' full-time study and supervised research training after a Bachelor's degree with Honours.

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 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 to one another 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 PhD (see page 4 for guidelines). In certain approved disciplines, the thesis may include **creative work** (see page 5 for guidelines).

Examiner's report and recommendation form

Each examiner is asked to return an examination report and a signed Recommendation Form to the Thesis 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 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 titled *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 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. Questions provided by the Overseas Examiner will be presented to the Candidate. In certain circumstances, the Dean may invite the Overseas Examiner to join via video conference. However, overseas examiners are still required to submit questions in writing. The primary supervisor will normally attend 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. 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

At the oral defence the examination panel will determine 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 the 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.

Guidelines for including publications in a doctoral thesis

Reference: Doctoral Regulations: for PhD and other Doctorates with Theses section 4.2(i)

*"The thesis may include the candidate's work that has been published or accepted for publication prior to the submission of the thesis for examination, **provided that the research has been conducted under supervision during the period of enrolment**. Except as provided for within an approved co-tutelle arrangement work submitted for another qualification, whether completed or not, at this or any other university may not be so included."*

1. Victoria University of Wellington does not offer a 'thesis by publication' option. It does, however, permit (and even encourage) candidates to publish their research while they are registered. The publications may be included in their thesis provided that the following conditions are satisfied.
2. The thesis must be an integrated and coherent work. Whatever published materials are included, the Candidate must provide the thesis with appropriate additional materials to establish coherence and demonstrate integration. As a minimum, this will include an introductory chapter that clearly establishes the research question(s) and provides some framework for the published items and a concluding chapter that draws out the key and original contributions of the thesis as a whole. Other materials (such as a literature review or a methodology chapter) may be required by individual supervisors as appropriate to the discipline.
3. The publication must arise from original research conducted by the Candidate while under supervision.
4. The Candidate may only submit work for which they are the sole author or primary (lead) author and for which they have written at least 50% of the text. If the Candidate is not the sole author, the contribution of other authors must be clearly described and attested by the Candidate and the Victoria University of Wellington supervisor, using the appropriate bibliographical form which is to be included within the thesis.
5. Any item of published material may only be submitted by one doctoral candidate.
6. Any previously published material must be appropriately and fully referenced, and the Candidate must obtain permission from the publisher to include the work in their thesis. Confirmation of such permission must be provided by the Candidate with the Statement of Authorship.
7. Candidates are normally expected to present their thesis in a single format (as to margins, typeface, etc). Changes to published material to effect such consistency need not be noted. However, candidates may wish to revise previously published material to update information, to clarify an argument, or to provide additional data. Such changes must be drawn to the examiners' attention.
8. All aspects of the thesis can be examined, both in the written report and in the oral examination. Examiners may disagree with the Candidate's arguments or results, irrespective of whether the work has been published, and may require revision of such work for the thesis. The expectation that the Candidate may be questioned on and be able to defend all aspects of the thesis extends equally to co-authored work.
9. If a thesis that includes significant published work does not include the mandatory introductory and concluding material as described in **2.** above, the examiners may require that such additional material be provided and may choose to re-examine the thesis as a result.

Guidelines for including a creative work in a doctoral thesis

The PhD degree is awarded based on a substantial piece of original research conducted under proper academic supervision and within a research environment.

In the creative arts, a PhD thesis may take the form of a performance and/or a corpus of creative work together with a dissertation that addresses, elucidates, and contextualises the work, or provides scholarly analysis pertinent to the research question being addressed. On occasion, the thesis may adopt a 'hybrid' approach in which the creative and critical strands are intertwined.

The dissertation and the creative work (when they are not intertwined as described above) are considered as complementary parts of a single project and, though separable, are examined as an integrated whole. The dissertation should not be a simple description of the creative work or a reflective journal on the creative process. While it may include information on the materials and methodology used and place the creative work in an artistic, intellectual, and/or cultural context, the dissertation must answer to the requirement of every PhD research thesis that it makes an original contribution to knowledge.

The format of the creative work component of the thesis will be agreed between the candidate and supervisor, approved by the Head of School at confirmation, and made available to examiners.

Criteria for examination of creative work

Examiners are asked to consider whether the candidate:

- has identified a research question or questions that are explored through the creative work
- demonstrates an advanced level of familiarity with and understanding of contemporary work in the field
- demonstrates a high standard of literacy in the relevant artistic form
- employs methods and techniques in execution that are appropriate to the subject matter and that are original and/or aesthetically effective
- has presented their work in a professional manner (where appropriate)

Where the creative work includes elements of performance, design, or exhibition, it must be documented (including any catalogue or programme material) to a standard that will ensure the work provides a reference for subsequent researchers.

The thesis (that is, the creative work and the dissertation together) must:

- constitute a significant original contribution to knowledge in the subject area with which it deals
- demonstrate an appropriate and substantiated connection between its constituent parts

Examiners are advised that they may ask for revisions of any aspect of the thesis if they consider that it does not meet the expected level of scholarship. They may ask that critical or exegetical sections be revised or re-written. Equally, they may ask that creative works be 'revised' in a way that is appropriate to that discipline.