Guidelines

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# Academic Regulations for Higher Degrees by Research

University of South Australia Academic Regulations for Higher Degrees by Research: [http://i.unisa.edu.au/policies-and-procedures/university-policies/research/res-10-regulations/](http://i.unisa.edu.au/policies-and-procedures/university-policies/research/res-10-regulations/%20)

Examination of Thesis: Clause 17

# Introduction

Professional doctoral research is careful, rigorous and sustained work demonstrating that the candidate is a scholar of standing in professional and academic spheres. This program is normally completed in the equivalent of three years full-time.

These guidelines refer to the Professional Doctorate by Research and present criteria for the examination of the research.

These guidelines are intended to assist examiners in their consideration of research work submitted for Professional Doctoral degrees of the ‘research’ variety. The term ‘research work’ can mean, depending on the Award, any combination of the following: thesis; dissertation; portfolio of work; exegesis; artefact; published articles; and others as specified in the Award. In particular, these guidelines are intended to guide the examiner not familiar with the standards required for Professional Doctorate degrees to reach a just decision that does not disadvantage the candidate.

Examiners are expected to be knowledgeable in research, scholarship and practice in the professional area of the submitted work, thus ensuring that their knowledge of the professional field is current. They should be familiar with the research, supervision and examination processes involved in higher degrees by research.

# Criteria for Professional Doctorate by Research

Professional doctoral programs at the University of South Australia consist of two components: coursework and research, both of which must be successfully completed. The coursework component of the Professional Doctorate by Research accounts for up to one-half of the total needed to meet program requirements and must be completed prior to the submission of the research component for examination.

The following criteria apply to the body of research work submitted for examination:

* *A significant and original contribution to knowledge about professional practice and a contribution to knowledge of fact and/or theory.*

‘Originality’ may be shown in several ways. For example, the candidate may have posed an important new problem with current practice, have formulated an existing problem in a novel and useful way, investigated previously ignored material, offered new and significant insights about issues which have been examined by other researchers, developed new techniques for investigating issues, applied appropriate techniques to a new set of problems or developed new ways of applying existing knowledge to practice. Replications of previous investigations would be acceptable if they incorporated new elements in the design or execution of the investigation and/or if they aimed to develop new knowledge about professional practice. The research must result in the drawing of conclusions relevant to professional practice.

While it is difficult to assess what constitutes ‘a significant contribution’, one important way of gauging if a candidate’s work meets this expectation is to consider the extent to which the findings of the thesis are publishable in the professional literature. Other evidence could have been in the form of a presentation to industry and/or the profession, quality of professional publications, impact on organization/profession and evidence of industry involvement during the process of research. Normally, satisfactory professional doctoral research would be expected to form the basis of at least one article in a recognized professional journal. It would be helpful for the examiner to offer an opinion on the publishable content of the research.

* *A critical appreciation of the literature relevant to the research project.*

Candidates should demonstrate that they have become sufficiently familiar with, and have an adequate grasp of, the literature relevant to the research project in order to be able to make a critical assessment of the present state of knowledge in the subject. In professional doctorates it is expected that both scholarly and professional literatures will be included. Candidates should include current and relevant key references and debates in the relevant areas.

* *A well designed and structured investigation (or set of investigations).*

Candidates should present evidence to show that they have satisfactorily designed, undertaken and concluded research appropriate to the field. Research aims should be described clearly and the study design should be appropriate for the aims and for the field of study. The research report(s) should show that the techniques adopted were appropriate to the subject matter and were applied properly. All data collected should be analysed rigorously and with due attention to relevant ethical codes. The research report(s) should be written succinctly and in good English. The research should communicate the purpose and results of the research in a concise, logical and effective manner.

* *Information is presented in a manner consistent with the relevant discipline(s).*

The results should be presented in a manner that is consistent with the relevant academic and/or professional field. The text must be written clearly, accurately and cogently, and all sources must be documented fully. The research should be presented in a manner consistent with publications in recognized academic or professional journals. The research report should be free of typographical and grammatical errors.

* *A critical appraisal of his/her own work relative to that of others*

Candidates should show that they recognise the limitations of the study and should justify fully any conclusions. The research should demonstrate that candidates are able to assess the contribution of their own work to the state of knowledge about professional practice in the relevant disciplines.

* *Evidence of independent and critical thought*

Candidates should show that they have conceived original ideas for investigation from their independent, critical inquiry of the literature. They should state clearly the central theme or argument, to develop this theme systematically and to assess the results of their investigations in a critical manner.

# Extract from the University’s Academic Regulations

*17.3.2* Professional Doctorate by Research degree: Examiners shall examine the thesis according to the following criteria:

1. The research degree student's capacity to:

* Demonstrate a significant and original contribution to knowledge about professional practice and a contribution to knowledge of fact and/or theory;
* Demonstrate a critical appreciation of the literature relevant to the research project;
* Capacity to design a well-designed and structured investigation (or set of investigations);
* Present information in a manner consistent with the relevant discipline(s);
* Demonstrate a critical appraisal of their own work relative to that of others;
* Present evidence of independent and critical thought

1. The quality of the presentation of the thesis/exhibition, including:

* the clarity of expression,
* the accuracy and appropriateness of presentation of results,
* the quality and relevance of illustrative material (such as graphs, tables, illustrations)
* the relevance and accuracy of citations, references, etc and
* the development of a coherent argument where relevant to the field of study, and

1. The worthiness of the thesis/exhibition for publication in any appropriate form.

# Examples to assist Examiners in indicating the contribution to scholarship

**(1) Pass forthwith**

* The thesis is worthy to be awarded the Degree of Professional Doctorate by Research
* The thesis is worthy of the degree without substantial changes.
* It is a sound and original work of scholarship, worthy of publication.
* The arguments are clearly expressed and the data analysis is appropriate and effective.
* It is well presented with relevant and detailed annotations.
* Parts of the thesis may already have been published in reputable journals.

**(2) Pass following minor corrections (including typographical errors) being completed and certified by the Dean of Research (or delegate)**

* As above, however there are a significant number of typographical errors or other minor amendments requiring attention, or specific changes of substance that are not sufficient to justify deferral, revision, resubmission and further examination.

**(3a) Pass, following major corrections.** **I do not need to see the thesis again and I delegate authority to the University's Research Degrees Committee or nominee the responsibility of being satisfied that the amendments have been made in line with the examiners' reports.**

* The thesis is satisfactory and the research methodology is sound, however a number of changes need to be made to the thesis. These may include revising the literature review, seeking out additional references, rewriting of parts of the thesis and/or reorganising the order of the chapters.
* Examiners delegate responsibility for ensuring amendments are carried out to the University’s Research Degrees Committee but should note that the University’s Research Degrees Committee may seek the assistance of an Independent Reviewer with appropriate expertise to endorse that the corrections have been made as specified in the examiners’ reports. Examiners are free to make this recommendation if they so choose.

**(3b) Pass, following major corrections. I would like to see the thesis again in order to be satisfied that the amendments have been made in line with my recommendation.**

* The thesis is satisfactory and the research methodology is sound, however a number of changes need to be made to the thesis. These may include revising the literature review, seeking out additional references, rewriting of parts of the thesis and/or reorganising the order of the chapters.
* The examiner considers it preferable to see the thesis again to verify that the changes have been made to the satisfaction of the examiner prior to final acceptance by the University.

*THIS DOES NOT CONSTITUTE A RE-EXAMINATION.*

**(4) Revise and resubmit for re-examination (by the same examiners where possible) after a period of further research**

* At this stage, the thesis is not of sufficient quality to be awarded the Degree of Professional Doctorate by Research
* The thesis does not meet the criteria stipulated, for example the research methodology may be inappropriate, and the argument is not clearly expressed or is flawed.
* However the thesis has merit and could be brought to the required standard with additional research and revision as specified in the examination report.
* In such instances the University allows candidates 6 months (full-time equivalent) in which to revise and resubmit the thesis.

**(5) Fail.**

* The thesis lacks coherence and argument.
* There is lack of understanding of the theory involved.
* The research has confused theoretical and methodological perspectives.
* The work is not original or is of minimal scholarly value.