

# Thesis Examination Procedures

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## Contents

About this document.....	2
1.0 Doctoral Thesis Examination Procedures.....	3
1.1 Doctoral Thesis Submission.....	3
1.2 Appointment of Doctoral Examiners and Examination Chair.....	3
1.2.1 Appointment of Examiner with Potential Conflict of Interest.....	4
1.2.2 Communication During the Examination Process.....	5
1.3 Thesis Examination.....	5
1.3.1 Independent Thesis Reports and Recommendations.....	5
1.3.2 Decision Making Process.....	6
1.3.3 Oral Examination Process.....	7
1.3.4 Preparing for the Oral Examination.....	8
1.3.5 Mode of the Oral Examination.....	8
1.3.6 Roles and Attendance at the Oral Examination.....	8
1.3.7 Structure of the Oral Examination.....	9
1.4 Outcome of Oral Examination.....	10
1.4.1 Recommendations.....	10
1.4.2 After the Oral Examination.....	11
1.4.3 Revise and Resubmit Outcome.....	11
1.5 Appeals.....	11
2.0 Master's Thesis Examination Procedures.....	13
2.1 Master's Thesis Submission.....	13
2.2 Nomination and Approval of Master's Examiners.....	13
2.2.1 Communication during the examination process.....	14
2.3 Thesis Examination.....	14
2.3.1 Final grade determination and release of reports.....	14
2.4 Appeals.....	15
Appendix A: Further Information for Examiners.....	16
Appendix B: Glossary.....	17
Appendix C: Confidentiality, sensitive theses, and embargoes.....	19
Appendix D: Contact information for students.....	20

## About this document

This document details the procedures for the submission and examination of PhD, EdD, DHSc, and research master's theses. It should be read in conjunction with the relevant Regulations and the Research Student Supervision Policy. For guidance on DMA and higher doctorate examination procedures, please [contact](#) Te Kura Tāura | UC Graduate School directly.

Where there is any discrepancy between this document and regulations for a degree, the Regulations prevail.

Please be aware that links in this document will download copies of relevant forms directly from UC's website.

Te Kura Tāura | UC Graduate School wish to acknowledge Victoria University of Wellington and Auckland University of Technology, whose examination guidelines helped inform this document.

# 1.0 Doctoral Thesis Examination Procedures

## 1.1 Doctoral Thesis Submission

PhD students must have completed at least three years of equivalent full-time study prior to submitting their thesis (i.e., 360 points). The maximum period of enrolment is four years of equivalent full-time study (i.e., 480 points). The Amo Rangahau | Dean of Postgraduate Research (or delegate) may vary these time limits if extenuating circumstances are demonstrated. Please refer to the Regulations for full details. If you are in a doctoral programme other than the PhD, refer to the relevant Regulations for that programme for submission timeframes.

The final submission date for a doctoral thesis will always occur on the last day of a month, regardless of the day of the week. A thesis must be submitted to Te Kura Tāura | UC Graduate School no later than 11.59pm on the final thesis submission date. A thesis submitted after the final thesis submission date may not be examined. Students and their supervisors should discuss the intended submission timeframe and required steps at least one month prior to the intended date.

A student must be enrolled at the time of thesis submission but will not remain enrolled after they have submitted their thesis. International students must ensure that they are on a suitable visa, and Te Kura Tāura will provide a letter in support of a Post Study Work Visa as part of the submission process. Students should continue to check their pg email address regularly as Te Kura Tāura will use this for correspondence related to the thesis examination.

The thesis should be submitted as a PDF to Te Kura Tāura. In cases where a thesis file is too large, it can be sent as a filesharing link or physically submitted to Te Kura Tāura on a portable drive during office hours.

Before the examination of a thesis can proceed, students and supervisors must complete and submit a Thesis Submission and Use form and Appointment of Examiners form to Te Kura Tāura. Te Kura Tāura staff will advise of any outstanding documents at the time of processing a new thesis submission. All forms can be found on Te Kura Tāura's website.

If a thesis is to be treated as sensitive, an Embargo and Secure Thesis Examination Request form must be completed and should accompany the thesis submission. If a thesis is sensitive, it may be preferable to submit this on a portable drive. Students and supervisors should discuss security requirements prior to submission. Further information on security levels can be found in Appendix C.

While not advisable, a student may choose to submit their thesis without the support of their supervisory team.

Theses may be written in English or te reo Māori.

## 1.2 Appointment of Doctoral Examiners and Examination Chair

The Tumuaki Tari/Kura | Head of Department/School, in consultation with the Senior Supervisor and student, must nominate an Examination Chair and two independent Examiners to participate in the Examination Process. The Amo Rangahau | Dean of Postgraduate Research (the Dean) will review and approve, or otherwise, the nominations for Examiners and the Examination Chair. Alternative nominations will be sought if required.

The Examination Chair is usually a senior academic (i.e., Associate Professor and above) with previous experience supervising doctoral students and examining doctoral theses who has not

been involved in the student's research, as a supervisor or advisor. The Examination Chair should be a UC staff member who has attended at least two Oral Examinations at UC previously. The Examination Chair has various functions and responsibilities throughout the examination; these are detailed in the rest of this document.

Both Examiners must be independent (as described below) and external to UC. At least one of the Examiners must be international (i.e., working outside of Aotearoa New Zealand). Should two international examiners be requested, strong justification must be provided to inform the Dean's decision making. Two examiners from Aotearoa New Zealand will only be approved in special or unusual circumstances. While acknowledging the relatively small pool of potential examiners in some disciplines, it is important that the same examiners, and especially the same combinations of two examiners, are not over-used.

The underlying principle guiding the selection of examiners is that the thesis is examined in a fair and transparent manner by independent experts. Examiners should:

- a. Be active researchers or individuals with recent research/publication history.
- b. Have considerable expertise in the topic and/or the methodology of the thesis.
- c. Have an equivalent level of qualification to the thesis they are examining. In special circumstances, and with approval from the Dean, an examiner not holding an equivalent qualification may be appointed where satisfactory evidence of adequate experience is provided.
- d. Be independent, that is, free from any conflicts of interest. Te Kura Tāura is informed by the [Australian Council of Graduate Research Guidelines](#) conventions in the consideration of conflicts of interest in examination. The presence of a conflict does not necessarily preclude an examiner from participating in an examination (see Section 1.2.1 below). However, conflicts should be declared as part of the process, and responsibly managed.

One of the examiners is designated the Oral Examiner. This examiner provides a written report and recommendation on the thesis and participates in the Oral Examination. The other examiner, termed the Second Examiner, also provides a written report and recommendation regarding the thesis but does not usually attend the Oral Examination. It is the Senior Supervisor's responsibility to ensure that examiners have agreed to act in these roles prior to recommending them.

A doctoral student has the right to make a case to the Dean that a nominated examiner is not appropriate. This must be provided in writing, with evidence as to why the nominated examiner should not be approved. The Dean will consider the evidence and decide as to whether to appoint the examiner.

The doctoral thesis will be sent out for examination once all required documents have been submitted and the Examiners approved. Staff in Te Kura Tāura will let the student know once the examiners have confirmed receipt of the thesis.

At any point in the Examination Process, the Dean has the right to replace an Examiner or the Examination Chair should it be deemed appropriate to the circumstances. When an Examiner or an Examination Chair is replaced, the student will be informed by Te Kura Tāura.

### 1.2.1 Appointment of Examiner with Potential Conflict of Interest

The following process is used in the appointment of an examiner with a potential conflict of interest. The conflict of interest should be declared on the Appointment of Examiners form along with the rationale for why the appointment is still appropriate (e.g., scarcity of available examiners in the discipline). The Dean will review the information provided. If the Dean decides the appointment may be appropriate, they will then write to the nominated examiner and ask them to declare the conflict of interest and whether they are able to examine the thesis in an impartial manner. The Dean will then make the final decision on the examiner appointment.

## 1.2.2 Communication During the Examination Process

The student and members of their supervisory team must not communicate directly with Examiners from the time at which they are appointed by the Dean through to the completion of the examination process (i.e., the student has been advised of the result of their oral examination). The exception is during the Oral Examination where discussion is required.

Examiners should not communicate with each other unless specifically requested to do so by the Dean, or Te Kura Tāura staff. Any questions regarding the thesis or the examination process should be directed to staff in Te Kura Tāura.

The Examination Chair can communicate with all parties during the course of the examination. The Examination Chair should keep Te Kura Tāura informed of communication that they have with students and/or examiners during the examination process.

## 1.3 Thesis Examination

There are two main stages of a doctoral thesis examination:

1. **Independent thesis reports and recommendations:** The submitted thesis is reviewed by the two independent Examiners. Each Examiner writes a report on the thesis and makes a recommendation to the Dean regarding the outcome of this stage of the examination process. The Dean will review their recommendations and determine whether the student will proceed to Oral Examination.
2. **Oral Examination:** The Oral Examination provides an opportunity for the student to showcase their research and knowledge, and allows the examiner to delve further into the research reported in the written thesis. At the conclusion of the Oral Examination the Examination Chair, on the advice of the Oral Examiner, will make a recommendation to the Dean regarding the award of the degree.

The examination process is discussed in detail below. Note that the Oral Examination cannot proceed until the examiners' reports and recommendations have been reviewed and approved by the Dean. Any date proposed for the Oral Examination is provisional until this approval is confirmed. The date and time may change subject to delays in receiving or processing the reports and recommendations.

The doctoral examination process usually takes around three to four months. However, this process may be extended depending on the availability of examiners, level of amendments required following the Oral Examination, and any unexpected delays.

### 1.3.1 Independent Thesis Reports and Recommendations

Both examiners must independently review the thesis and complete a *Doctoral Examiner Report and Recommendation*. Examiners are requested to submit this document to Te Kura Tāura within 8 weeks of receiving the thesis.

An Examiner's written report should be relatively extensive, including comments on the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis and research. The reports are shared with the student and their supervisory team.

The Examiners' recommendations to the Dean are considered evaluative material under the Privacy Act and are not normally shared with students or supervisors.

Examiners must select from one of four recommendations to the Dean at this stage of the examination process:

### **1. The student proceeds to the Oral Examination**

If the recommendation is to proceed to the Oral Examination, the written report should also list key questions and/or topics to be addressed at the Oral Examination.

Amendments are usually required following the Oral Examination. These may be minor (e.g., typographical/grammatical corrections) or major (e.g., re-writing sections of the thesis).

Amendments should be limited to changes necessary to ensure that the research meets the required standard for the award. A final recommendation on required amendments will be made by the Examination Chair to the Dean, based on the views of the Oral Examiner.

Amendments are usually expected to take up to 3 months of equivalent full-time study but may take more or less time depending on the student and supervisors' commitments or working style.

### **2. The student be invited to revise and resubmit the thesis for re-examination.**

This option should be selected if the submitted thesis does not meet the standard required for the award, but it is thought that, with considerable reworking, the thesis could meet that standard. For example, in the examiner's view the thesis may require:

- additional data collection; or,
- a full reanalysis of a data set; or,
- substantial rewriting of the content of the thesis.

This is not an exhaustive list.

If, in the examiner's opinion, the recommended amendments do not meet this threshold, then a recommendation of proceeding to the Oral Examination may be more appropriate. The revise and resubmit option is a significant undertaking and requires the student to re-enrol, usually for a period of between three and 12 months of equivalent full-time study. When the thesis is submitted for re-examination, the original examiners will be asked to examine the revised submission.

This outcome can be offered on only one occasion, either prior to or following the Oral Examination.

### **3. The student be awarded an appropriate master's degree.**

This option should be selected if the thesis does not meet the standard required for doctoral theses. Furthermore, that it is the examiner's view that even with at least 12 months of further enrolment, the thesis is unlikely to meet the required standard. In selecting this option, it is the examiner's opinion that the thesis is currently at or near an acceptable standard for the award of a master's degree.

### **4. No degree be awarded to the student.**

This option should be selected if the submitted thesis does not meet the standard required for the award of either a doctoral or master's degree. This would be most appropriate where the research reported lacks both breadth and depth and is of very poor quality in its presentation.

## **1.3.2 Decision Making Process**

The Dean will review the Examiners' recommendations and written reports and decide whether the student may proceed to the Oral Examination. The decision-making process is as follows, noting that the Dean may vary this process where special or unusual circumstances warrant:

- a) **Both Examiners recommend that the student proceed to the Oral Examination:** The Dean will invite the student to proceed to the Oral Examination, usually without further correspondence with the Examiners.
- b) **One Examiner recommends that the student proceed to the Oral Examination, and the other recommends that the student Revise and Resubmit their thesis:** The Examination Chair will be asked to contact the Examiners and request that they have an email discussion (or meet online with the Examination Chair in attendance) to determine whether a consensus can be achieved. Draft text will be provided to the Chair to facilitate this discussion. The correspondence must be retained, or notes taken from any online meeting(s), in case there is any dispute later about how consensus was reached. In some circumstances, the Dean may also contact the Examiners directly to discuss their reports. If a consensus cannot be reached, the Dean will make the final decision on the next steps. In doing so, the Dean may appoint an independent third Examiner or an Adjudicator. The respective roles of the independent third Examiner and the Adjudicator are discussed in the Glossary to this document.
- c) **Both Examiners recommend that the student Revise and Resubmit their thesis:** The Dean will make a final decision. This may, or may not, involve further correspondence with the Examiners.
- d) **At least one Examiner recommends the award of a Master's degree, or no award:** The Dean will make a final decision. The Dean may make a decision based solely on the written reports, through discussion with the examiners, or may appoint a third independent Examiner or Adjudicator.

The Dean's decision will be conveyed to the student, their senior supervisor, and the Examination Chair. If the decision is to proceed to the Oral Examination, Te Kura Tāura staff will liaise with the Examination Chair about the organisation of the Oral Examination and will provide the examiner reports to be released to the student and supervisors.

### 1.3.3 Oral Examination Process

The Oral Examination is a formal examination that provides an opportunity to discuss the student's research and its applications, probe the student's knowledge, and consider any future directions that may stem from the work in a constructive and supportive manner. A tentative date for the Oral Examination will be proposed in the Appointment of Examiners form. The date of the Oral Examination can only be confirmed, however, once the examiner reports have been received and the decision has been made to proceed to the next stage.

Oral examinations may be conducted in English, te reo Māori, or New Zealand Sign Language.

The Oral Examination does not include a public presentation, but a presentation may be held prior to or following the examination. In these cases, the Chair needs to explicitly state to the student and examiners when the presentation has ended and when the examination has commenced. Any public presentation should not form part of the formal assessment.

Following the Oral Examination, the Examination Chair will make the recommendation to the Dean regarding the outcome, based on the views of the Oral Examiner. The Examination Chair does not have a formal role in deciding the results of the examination. The Dean will decide on the outcome of the Oral Examination after review of the recommendation. The decision will be conveyed to the student and their supervisory team by staff from Te Kura Tāura.



### 1.3.4 Preparing for the Oral Examination

Prior to the Oral Examination, the **Examination Chair** is responsible for:

- Organising the time and date of the examination. A suggested date should be included on the Appointment of Examiners form which the Examination Chair and student sign prior to the thesis being sent out for examination.
- Releasing the examiners' reports to the student, supervisors and examiners along with instructions to proceed to the next stage once they have been advised by Te Kura Tāura. Examiner reports can be released to the student and supervisors a minimum of five and a maximum of ten calendar days prior to the examination (not including the day of the examination). Queries regarding the receipt of the examination forms and recommendations should be directed to Te Kura Tāura rather than to the examiners.
- Engaging with the examiner(s) attending the Oral Examination and ensuring they are aware of the format of the examination and the questions to be asked.
- Ensuring that the student and supervisors are aware of the format of the Oral Examination and addressing any concerns the students may have and/or special considerations that may be required.
- Arranging relevant videoconferencing and any ITS assistance needed.

### 1.3.5 Mode of the Oral Examination

The Oral Examination can either take place face-to-face or online. The mode for each examination is indicated on the Appointment of Examiners form and should be discussed with the Student, Senior Supervisor, Examination Chair and Oral Examiner at the time of thesis submission.

Exams should usually be online or hybrid (where those in Christchurch meet in person and those elsewhere join online). Consideration should be given to the environmental impacts of providing travel for examiners, as well as the impacts that unexpected delays in the examination process may have on available travel dates. Any travel must be funded through the School or Department. Te Kura Tāura encourages online examinations where possible and appropriate.

### 1.3.6 Roles and Attendance at the Oral Examination

The following individuals must attend the Oral Examination:

1. The Student
2. The Examination Chair
3. The Oral Examiner
4. At least one member of the supervisory team (usually the Senior Supervisor)

#### **Observers:**

The student may also invite up to two support people to act as observers during the Oral Examination. A **UC staff member who is training as an Examination Chair** may attend the Oral Examination as an observer, with the student's consent. Observers may not participate in the examination or communicate in any way during the examination.

#### **Oral Examination roles:**

The **Student** provides a brief presentation of their thesis, responds to questions posed by the Oral Examiner and/or Examination Chair, and engages in discussion about their research.

The **Examination Chair** is a neutral party who is responsible for ensuring that the examination proceeds fairly, in a cordial and collegial manner, and that the academic standards and integrity of the University are upheld.



At the Oral Examination, the Examination Chair is responsible for ensuring that questions posed by any absent Examiners are put to the student and writing an unbiased report summarising the proceedings of the Oral Examination and the recommended outcome of the examination to the Dean.

The **Oral Examiner** poses questions and engages the student in discussion based on their written report. The Oral Examiner may also present the second examiner's questions. The Oral Examiner provides a recommendation to the Examination Chair regarding the outcome of the examination.

The **Second Examiner** does not usually attend or have a role in the Oral Examination. If the Second Examiner wishes to attend the Oral Examination, they may do so. If the Second Examiner attends the Oral Examination, they may participate in the Examination to pose their questions, but it is the Oral Examiner who must make the final decision on which recommendation goes to the Dean.

At least one member of the **supervisory team** must attend the examination. It is expected that the **Senior Supervisor**, at a minimum, is in attendance. Members of the supervisory team attend as observers, although where appropriate the Examination Chair may invite them to answer specific questions. Supervisors play no role in determining the outcome of the Oral Examination. The supervisory team may only participate in the examination to the extent invited by the Chair and should not offer any answers to the questions posed to the student.

### 1.3.7 Structure of the Oral Examination

There may be changes to the format of the Oral Examination to enable the thesis to be examined in a culturally appropriate manner. The Oral Examination should not be recorded.

The Oral Examination usually proceeds as follows:

#### **Karakia and welcome**

The examination begins with a welcome and optional karakia. The Examination Chair will remind those present of the structure and requirements of the examination.

#### **Student presentation**

The Examination Chair will invite the student to introduce their research and respond to the examiners' reports, which usually takes the form of a prepared presentation of 10 to 20 minutes. This may be either a closed presentation or a public presentation with audience questions; if public, the presentation should be concluded and the audience advised to leave before the examiner questioning begins.

#### **Examiner questions**

The Examination Chair will invite the Oral Examiner to pose their questions to the student and will ensure that there is opportunity for all the questions to be addressed. The Examination Chair is responsible for ensuring that the examination is conducted in a cordial and collegial manner. This includes timekeeping and may involve moving the examination forward from a given discussion point. The Examination Chair will ensure that the questions posed by the Second Examiner in their written report are put to the student (either by asking themselves or inviting the Oral Examiner to ask) and ensure that all questions posed have been addressed to the Oral Examiner's satisfaction. The student will be invited to make any final comments.

#### **Deliberation**

The Examination Chair will request all attendees except the Oral Examiner leave the room (or call) to give the Oral Examiner time to consider their decision. If the Second Examiner is present this may include discussion with the Second Examiner, though the final recommendation is made by the Oral Examiner. The Senior Supervisor can be invited by the Chair (with approval of the examiner/s) to stay for the deliberation, but they do not have voting rights. The result proposed by the Oral

Examiner is a recommendation to the Dean, which must be reviewed and approved (or otherwise) following the Oral Examination.

### Conclusion

The Examination Chair will invite the others back into the room or call once a decision has been reached. The student should be informed of the recommendation regarding the outcome of the Oral Examination that will be made to the Dean. Amendment/revision dates should be discussed and agreed to among the student, supervisor and examiner. The timeframe to complete any amendments should be realistic based on the student and supervisors' workloads and working style. If an extension is required to complete the amendments, further approval by the Dean of Postgraduate Research is required. The examination should conclude with karakia if it was opened with karakia.

## 1.4 Outcome of Oral Examination

### 1.4.1 Recommendations

Following the oral examination, the Examination Chair will make a recommendation to the Dean, who will decide the outcome of the examination process.

- If the recommendation is that **the Doctorate be awarded with no amendments**, then the Examination Outcome form can be signed, and the Oral Examination concluded. This outcome still allows the student to address any typographical errors and minor editorial matters, but the award of the degree will not be contingent upon these changes.
- If the recommendation is that **the Doctorate be awarded subject to satisfactory completion of amendments**, then the required amendments are to be documented in the form. Required amendments should be specified and may refer to the examiners' reports. An evaluator of the amendments who is responsible for checking that the amendments have been completed satisfactorily needs to be appointed. This role is usually undertaken by the Senior Supervisor. A specific due date for the amendments also needs to be noted. Following submission of the amended thesis, the evaluator will need to complete the Amendments Approval form to confirm to the Dean that all amendments have been satisfactorily completed.
  - Minor amendments include more than superficial editorial corrections. Normally this would be expected to take up to one month of full-time work.
  - Major amendments may include rewriting a chapter, reorganising material in the thesis, improving or clarifying an argument, and omitting or deleting sections of the thesis. Normally this would be expected to take between one to three months of full-time work.
- If the recommendation is that **the student be invited to revise and resubmit the thesis** for re-examination, the required revisions are to be included in the form. Revisions are expected to be of significant depth or breadth (e.g., additional data collection, a full reanalysis of a data set, or substantial rewriting of the content of the thesis). The timeframe for resubmission must not exceed 12 months. This recommendation and the date suggested for completion are both required to be reviewed and approved (or otherwise) by the Dean. The opportunity to revise and resubmit a thesis can only be offered on one occasion, so this recommendation cannot be selected if the Oral Examination is being held following revise and resubmit process.
- If the recommendation is to **award a master's degree instead of a doctoral degree**, this will be considered on an individual basis by the Dean. This recommendation should only be made if the Oral Examiner is of the opinion that the student would be unable to bring the thesis to an acceptable passing standard within 12 months, but the work is at or close

to an acceptable standard for the award of a master's degree. Minor amendments prior to the award of the master's degree may be recommended.

- If the recommendation is to **award no degree**, this should only be recommended on the basis that the thesis does not meet the criteria for the award of the doctorate (and could not be brought up to a passing standard within 12 months) **and** does not meet the criteria for the award of an appropriate master's degree. The criteria for award of a master's degree are in the Master's Examiner Recommendation and Report form and can be reviewed during the deliberation stage of the examination if the participants are unfamiliar with these criteria.

### 1.4.2 After the Oral Examination

The Examination Chair will complete and submit the Examination Outcome Form to Te Kura Tāura as soon as possible after the Oral Examination. Digital or typed signatures are accepted, and the form should not be unduly delayed by gathering handwritten signatures. The Examination Chair should raise any issues with the Dean either prior to or at the time of submitting the recommendation form for review.

Te Kura Tāura will send the student a copy of their Examination Outcome form (which will include details of any amendments required) as soon as possible following the Dean's approval of the recommendation. An amended thesis needs to be submitted to Te Kura Tāura.

A student who passes their Oral Examination without any required amendments may choose to make editorial corrections to their thesis (such as spelling errors or formatting issues) and submit this edited thesis to Te Kura Tāura. In either case, the final amended version of the thesis must be submitted to Te Kura Tāura before the degree is awarded.

The examination process is ongoing until the student has been formally notified of their eligibility to graduate by Te Kura Tāura, and they should refrain from contacting their examiners until this time. The student is not permitted to use the title 'Doctor' until the degree has been conferred.

### 1.4.3 Revise and Resubmit Outcome

The Dean may invite a student to revise and resubmit their thesis either as an outcome of the initial report or recommendations, or as an outcome of the Oral Examination. A revision is a substantial undertaking and students will be required to re-enrol, pay fees, and reengage in the supervision process, usually for a period of up to 12 months.

Following notification that they have been invited to revise and resubmit their thesis, students are responsible for discussing with their supervisors an appropriate amount of time required to complete the revisions and requesting approval for this time of enrolment from the Dean. This must be reviewed and approved by the Dean but must not exceed 12 months. Any extensions to an approved timeframe must be applied for via an Extension to a Milestone form.

Usually, the same Examiners will be invited to examine the revised thesis. Alternatives may be appointed if the original examiners are unavailable or if the Dean considers that the focus of the thesis has changed significantly enough that the revised thesis now falls outside of the expertise of an original examiner. Appointment of alternative examiners will follow the same process as the initial appointment of examiners. An examiner not recommending that a student proceed to the Oral Examination is not sufficient justification for their replacement.

## 1.5 Appeals

A student may appeal a decision made by the Dean during the examination process if they are not satisfied with the decision. Further information about the appeals process is available on UC's [Raise a Concern webpage](#).

## 2.0 Master's Thesis Examination Procedures

### 2.1 Master's Thesis Submission

Master's theses may be due on any date during a month. It is the responsibility of a master's student to know their final submission date and ensure they submit their thesis by 11.59pm on or before their final submission date. A thesis submitted after the final thesis submission date will not be examined. The thesis should be submitted as a PDF to Te Kura Tāura | UC Graduate School. In cases where a thesis file is too large, it can be sent as a filesharing link or physically submitted to Te Kura Tāura on a portable drive during office hours.

Some students (depending on the specific degree regulations) may be eligible for honours if they submit by a specified date, which may be earlier than the *final* submission date. Students should discuss eligibility for honours with the Faculty that administers their specific degree.

Before the examination of a thesis can proceed, students and supervisors must complete and submit a Thesis Submission and Use form and Appointment of Examiners form to Te Kura Tāura. Te Kura Tāura staff will advise of any outstanding documents at the time of processing a new thesis submission. All forms can be found on Te Kura Tāura's website.

If a thesis is to be treated as sensitive, an Embargo and Secure Thesis Examination Request form will also need to be completed and this should accompany the thesis submission. If a thesis is sensitive, it may be preferable to submit this on a portable drive. Students and supervisors should discuss security requirements prior to submission. Further information on security levels can be found in Appendix C.

Students must be enrolled when they submit their thesis. Students will not remain enrolled in the thesis paper after they have submitted their thesis. International students must ensure that they are on a suitable visa. Students should continue to check their pg email address regularly as Te Kura Tāura will use this for correspondence related to the thesis examination.

While not advisable, a student may choose to submit their thesis without the support of their supervisory team.

Theses may be written in English or te reo Māori.

### 2.2 Nomination and Approval of Master's Examiners

The Tumuaki Tari/Kura | Head of Department/School, in consultation with the Senior Supervisor and student, nominates two independent examiners. One examiner is external to the University of Canterbury, usually but not always located in Aotearoa New Zealand. The same criteria for selecting external examiners apply as for doctoral students, detailed in section 1.2 above.

The other examiner will usually be a continuing academic staff member of the University but cannot be a member of the supervisory team or otherwise involved in the student's research. It is understood that there is a high likelihood that an existing level of collaboration will exist between an internal examiner and the supervisor(s), especially when they are from the same Department/School. If no suitable examiner can be identified at the University, then two examiners external to the University may be nominated.

It is the Senior Supervisor's responsibility to ensure that examiners have agreed to act in this role prior to recommending them.

The Dean will consider the evidence provided regarding the suitability of the examiners (including any potential or actual conflicts of interest) on the Appointment of Examiners form and decide as to whether to appoint the examiner.

The student has the right to make a case to the Dean that a nominated examiner is not appropriate. This must be provided in writing on the Appointment of Examiners form, with evidence as to why the nominated examiner should not be approved. The Dean will consider the evidence and decide as to whether to appoint the examiner.

### 2.2.1 Communication during the examination process

Once the thesis examiners are approved, the research student and members of their supervisory team must not communicate directly with examiners about the thesis or thesis research until the examination process has been completed and a research student advised of the result of their examination. It is acknowledged that some communication may need to occur between supervisors/students and internal examiners on topics unrelated to the thesis (e.g. departmental matters or other teaching activities), however the thesis and examination process cannot be discussed until the conclusion of the examination has been advised by Te Kura Tāura.

Examiners should not communicate with each other unless specifically requested to do so, for example if a consensus needs to be reached. Any questions regarding the thesis or the examination process should be directed to Te Kura Tāura.

## 2.3 Thesis Examination

Both examiners must complete a *Master's Examiner Report and Recommendation* form. Examiners are requested to submit their reports to Te Kura Tāura within 6 weeks of receiving the thesis.

Examiners are asked to evaluate the thesis as a whole, rather than giving specific weighting to different aspects of the thesis.

Examiners shall not usually require substantive revision or correction of the thesis; changes should be limited to factual corrections only (e.g., incorrect unit labels, spelling errors, etc.). Examiners may suggest editorial corrections or formatting preferences, but these cannot be made mandatory. In exceptional circumstances, required amendments may be requested as per the process outlined in the [Master's Thesis Work Policy and Guidelines](#). The Dean will review such requests on a case-by-case basis.

The entire examination process can take between two and five months from submission depending on the availability of examiners, any additional administrative processes needed to determine a final grade, and other unexpected delays.

Criteria for a master's thesis examination can be found in the *Master's Examiner Report and Recommendation* form.

### 2.3.1 Final grade determination and release of reports

The final grade for a master's thesis is determined as per section 9.3 c) of the [Master's Thesis Work Policy and Guidelines](#). If one examiner recommends a failing grade (D or E) and the other recommends a passing grade, the Dean may request that an Adjudicator be appointed instead of proceeding with a consensus discussion.

Most master's theses will be given a letter grade based on the examiners' evaluations of relative merit of the work. The exception is the Master of Philosophy, which is assessed Pass/Fail only and will not receive a letter grade. Despite this difference in grade type, the criteria for the award are the same for the MPhil and other master's theses.

The grade awarded following the thesis examination is for the thesis paper only. If students are required to complete other papers as part of their degree, the grades received for other papers may affect a student's eligibility for honours and overall GPA for the degree.

The reports for a master's thesis will be released to the student along with notification of their grade.

## 2.4 Appeals

A student may appeal a decision made by the Dean during the examination process if they are not satisfied with the decision. Further information about the appeals process is available on UC's [Raise a Concern webpage](#).



## Appendix A: Further Information for Examiners

### Receiving the thesis

Te Kura Tāura will send the student's thesis and accompanying documents to the examiners digitally. Examiners are asked to confirm receipt of the documents, and Te Kura Tāura will follow up with examiners until they have confirmed this so that the student can be kept informed of the progress of their examination. Examiners are given 6-8 weeks to complete their reports and recommendations, depending on the level of the thesis being examined. If examiners need more time than this, it is important that they contact Te Kura Tāura as soon as possible to arrange a new due date so staff can keep students informed of delays. Te Kura Tāura will send a reminder prior to the report and recommendation due date and will continue to send regular reminders until the report and recommendation are received.

If a thesis is to be treated as sensitive/confidential, there may be some additional requirements in place such as completing Non-Disclosure Agreements prior to the thesis being sent. Te Kura Tāura staff will advise examiners of any additional requirements in these cases.

### Written examiners' reports

Te Kura Tāura will send a blank report and recommendation form to the examiners along with the student's thesis. The report should be addressed to the student and comments should be constructive. All fields in these documents need to be completed. Reports should be sent to Te Kura Tāura by the date specified in the original email, unless a new date is subsequently agreed.

Recommendations will be provided to the Dean for their consideration. If the recommendations differ, UC may contact the examiners to broker a consensus. If examiners wish to make any confidential comments to the Dean, they may do so in a separate email or letter (not as part of the report and recommendation).

If an examiner suspects plagiarism or other academic misconduct is evident in the thesis, they should contact Te Kura Tāura as soon as possible to bring this to the attention of the Dean.

### Examiner payments

Te Kura Tāura will send examiners the relevant payment forms along with the student's thesis. Doctoral examiners are paid \$400 (NZD, or equivalent in their local currency, which may be subject to local taxes and/or bank fees), and external master's examiners are paid \$150 (NZD, or equivalent in their local currency, which may be subject to local taxes and/or bank fees). Internal examiners are not paid, as examining theses is considered part of their expected employee contributions to research.

Payments will be processed after the report and recommendation have been received and may take some time to be paid depending on the payment type and timing of pay runs. If an examiner has not received their payment within 2 months from the date of their forms being received, they should contact Te Kura Tāura.

Invoices may be raised in some cases; please contact Te Kura Tāura staff to enquire about this.

### Confidentiality

All theses are to be kept confidential during the examination process and examiners should not distribute the copy of the thesis received for examination at any time. Unless there are special reasons, such as highly sensitive/confidential material in the thesis, the examiners are welcome to keep the thesis. Theses will be made available in the UC Research Repository after examination, or after any requested embargo period has ended. If an examiner has signed a non-disclosure agreement prior to this examination, the terms of confidentiality may extend beyond the examination period.

## Appendix B: Glossary

- **Adjudicator:** An examiner who may be appointed in the event of unresolvable conflicting recommendations between two Examiners, and the Dean requests a third expert opinion on the thesis. An Adjudicator is provided with the original examiner reports and recommendations and is asked to comment on the discrepancies between these, as well as providing their own report and recommendation for the thesis. Their recommendation must be within the bounds of the two original recommendations. This process is more commonly used for master's examinations, rather than a Third Examiner.
- **Amendments:** Changes made to a thesis, which may be minor or major, and are required to bring the thesis to a passing standard. A student does not need to be enrolled while completing amendments.
- **Amo Rangahau | Dean of Postgraduate Research (or "the Dean"):** This term refers to the Dean of Postgraduate Research or the person/s with appropriate delegated authority under UC's Academic and Research Delegations, such as the Associate Dean of Postgraduate Research or Postgraduate Research Manager.
- **Conferral:** Conferral or conferment is the legal process of awarding a qualification. All degrees are conferred *in absentia* at regular UC Council meetings and students can choose to attend a Graduation celebration. More information on application dates and upcoming council meetings can be found on the Graduation webpage [here](#).
- **Delegate:** A role at the university which holds delegated authority to undertake specified functions, powers, and duties under the Delegations of Authority Policy. Full information on delegations of authority can be found [here](#).
- **Editorial corrections:** Changes made to a thesis which are minor and are not required to bring the thesis to a passing standard, such as correction of spelling errors. A student does not need to be enrolled while making editorial corrections.
- **Eligible to graduate (also *graduand*):** If a student is eligible to graduate (i.e., is a "graduand"), it means they have completed all requirements of the degree and have no outstanding tasks or debts to the University. They may or may not have already applied to graduate but have not yet had their degree conferred.
- **Examination Chair:** A UC staff member who coordinates and directs the oral examination and ensure that it runs in a fair and collegial manner. Functions and responsibilities of the Examination Chair are described in more detail throughout this document.
- **Examiner:** A person who examines a doctoral or research master's thesis. They will usually be an academic or industry professional and will not have been involved with the student's research.
- **Graduation celebration:** The Graduation celebration is an optional event which students can attend where they will wear academic regalia and cross the stage.

- **Karakia:** A Māori prayer or incantation invoking spiritual guidance and protection, used to open a gathering such as the Oral Examination. If karakia is said at the start of a gathering, it should also be said to conclude the proceedings.
- **Revisions:** Significant major changes which need to be made to a thesis and are required to bring the thesis to a passing standard. A student needs to be enrolled while completing revisions and have access to supervision.
- **Te Kura Tāura:** This is the te reo Māori (Māori language) name for the UC Graduate School.
- **Third Examiner:** An examiner who may be appointed in the event of unresolvable conflicting recommendations between two Examiners, and the Dean requests a third expert opinion on the thesis. A Third Examiner is not provided with the original examiner reports or recommendations, they are asked to provide an independent opinion on the thesis. This process is more commonly used for doctoral examinations, rather than an Adjudicator.

## Appendix C: Confidentiality, sensitive theses, and embargoes

Some theses may be deemed sensitive, or the information contained within them may be considered sensitive. Research Students should discuss with their Senior Supervisor whether any embargo or restriction should be requested for their thesis or the examination process. Please refer to the University's [Intellectual Property Policy](#) and [Thesis Availability Policy](#) for further details. An Embargo and Secure Thesis Examination Request form must be submitted along with a sensitive/confidential thesis.

Levels of restriction can be applied as follows:

### Standard thesis

A standard thesis, in terms of levels of restriction, is any thesis which does not meet one of the below definitions and which may or may not have an embargo requested. These theses will have no restrictions applied during the examination process.

### Thesis embargo

At thesis submission, a request can be made to embargo a thesis for up to two years as per the circumstances detailed in the Thesis Availability Policy. An embargo means that the thesis will not be made available online in the UC Research Repository until the approved embargo period has ended. These theses will have no additional restrictions applied during the examination process.

### Confidential Thesis

Some theses may require completion of Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs) prior to the thesis being sent to examiners, and this is referred to as a Confidential Thesis. This is most common in cases where an existing contractual agreement with an industry partner specifies that NDAs are required. Examiners will be requested to destroy any saved or printed copies of the thesis following the examination.

### Sensitive Thesis

A Sensitive Thesis is defined in the Thesis Availability Policy. NDAs will usually be required for examiners, password protection may be applied when sending the thesis to examiners, and examiners will be requested to destroy any saved or printed copies of the thesis following the examination. Sensitive theses will be deposited to the Sensitive Thesis Archive and will not be made available in the UC Research Repository online.

### Protected Thesis

A Protected Thesis is any thesis which may contain technology/goods restricted under MFAT's [export controls](#). NDAs will usually be required for examiners, an Export of Strategic Goods application will be required for overseas examiners, email encryption and password protection will be applied when sending the thesis to examiners, and examiners will be advised that they must destroy any saved copies of the thesis following the examination. Protected theses will be deposited to the Sensitive Thesis Archive and will not be made available in the UC Research Repository online. Joint [Protective Security](#) and Universities New Zealand guidance on [Trusted Research – Protective Security Requirements](#) for researchers can be found here: [psr-trusted-research-guidance.pdf](#)

## Appendix D: Contact information for students

Topic	Contact
Examination status, questions about the overall submission/examination process	Te Kura Tāura ( <a href="mailto:graduateschool@canterbury.ac.nz">graduateschool@canterbury.ac.nz</a> )
Oral examination date/location (doctoral only)	Examination Chair
Amendments	Senior Supervisor
Enrolment and fee payment	Thesis Enrolments ( <a href="mailto:thesis-enrolment@canterbury.ac.nz">thesis-enrolment@canterbury.ac.nz</a> ) and/or Student Finance ( <a href="mailto:studentfinance@canterbury.ac.nz">studentfinance@canterbury.ac.nz</a> )
Visa	Immigration New Zealand or a licensed independent advisor. UC cannot provide personalised visa advice.
Attending a graduation celebration or having a degree conferred	Graduation ( <a href="mailto:graduation@canterbury.ac.nz">graduation@canterbury.ac.nz</a> or <a href="#">Graduation webpage</a> )
Transcripts	Transcripts ( <a href="mailto:transcript@canterbury.ac.nz">transcript@canterbury.ac.nz</a> or <a href="#">Transcripts webpage</a> )

He kōrero anō | Related Documents and Information

Ngā Waeture | UC Regulations

- [Academic Misconduct Regulations](#)
- [Appeals Regulations](#)
- [Doctoral Regulations](#)
- [General Regulations](#)
- [Research Course Regulations](#)

Te Pātaka Kaupapa Here | UC Policy Library

- [Academic Integrity Guidance](#)
- [Animal Ethics Committee Code of Ethical Conduct](#)
- [Allocation of Academic Activities and Establishing Academic Staff Workload Policy](#)
- [Conflict of Interest Policy](#)
- [Emails To Enrolled Students Policy and Guidelines](#)
- [Equity and Diversity Policy](#)
- [Financial and Enrolment Information – Doctorate, Master’s Thesis, and Dissertation Students Policy](#)
- [Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy](#)
- [Human Research Ethics Policy - Research Involving Human Participants](#)
- [Intellectual Property Policy](#)
- [Master's Thesis Work Policy and Guidelines](#)
- [Proofreading and Editing Guidelines](#)
- [Research Conduct Policy](#)
- [Research Student Supervision Policy](#)
- [Thesis Availability Policy](#)
- [Staff Code of Conduct](#)
- [Student Code of Conduct](#)

Te Pae Tukutuku me te Ipurangiroto o UC | UC Website and Intranet

- [A Guideline to Including Publications within a Doctoral or Research Master’s Thesis \(University website\)](#)
- [Forms and information for current doctoral students \(University website\)](#)
- [Forms and information for current research Master’s students \(University website\)](#)
- [Te Kura Tāura | UC Graduate School Homepage \(University website\)](#)
- [Raise a concern for Staff and Students \(University website\)](#)
- [Research Homepage \(University website\)](#)
- [UC Policy Library \(University UC Policy Library website\)](#)
- [University of Canterbury homepage \(University website\)](#)

Document History and Version Control Table			
Version	Action	Approval Authority	Action Date
1.0	Document approved by Dean of Postgraduate Research	Dean of Postgraduate Research	26 June 2024
1.1	Correction to terminology (“PhD” to “doctoral”)	Dean of Postgraduate Research	16 July 2024

1.2	Updated terminology for consistency	Dean of Postgraduate Research	4 August 2024
1.3	Added Examination Chair to Glossary and added some further detail in sections 1.2, 1.3.7, and Appendix A	Dean of Postgraduate Research	31 October 2024
1.4	Updated links and information about Protected Theses, fixed broken links	Dean of Postgraduate Research	30 May 2025