



Melbourne College of Divinity

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Working Procedures for HDR awards

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Note: *Director* refers to the Director of Research

Table of Contents

1	Enquiries	2
1.1	General enquiries	2
1.2	Overseas Students	2
2	Admissions and Credits	2
2.1	Admissions procedures	2
2.2	Admission to the MTheol under Regulation 7.2.1.3.....	3
2.3	Credits and advanced standing.....	3
3	Approval of research proposal, and upgrade or confirmation of candidature	3
3.1	Masters' candidates: Planning Stage.....	3
3.2	Master's candidates: Approval Panel.....	3
3.3	Upgrade from MA or MTheol to doctoral candidature.....	4
3.4	Doctoral candidates: Probationary Candidature	5
3.5	Doctoral candidates: Confirmation Panel	5
4	Student progress.....	5
4.1	Annual Report Form	5
4.2	Changes to research projects.....	5
4.3	Leave of absence	6
4.4	Extension of candidature.....	6
5	Appointment of Examiners	6
6	Submission and examination of the Thesis.....	6
6.1	Format	6
6.2	Submission processes.....	7
6.3	Examination	7
6.4	Oral Defence	8
6.5	Recommendations after the Examination	9
7	Lodgement of Theses	9

1 Enquiries

1.1 General enquiries

Enquiries about HDR candidature, if not originating at the MCD Kew office, are referred to the Research Manager, who is responsible for ensuring that each intending applicant is referred to an appropriate Research Coordinator. The Research Coordinator is selected in accord with the applicant's discipline and ecclesial tradition, and in some circumstances the applicant may be referred to more than one Coordinator.

Research Coordinators determine the eligibility of the applicant, and discuss with them the proposed research area, the adequacy of available resources, the names of potential Supervisors. The PG Application Form – Research, is a practical way of assisting with this process.

Applicants need to be informed of the various possibilities for financing their research.

1.2 Overseas Students

Overseas students do *not* include

- persons with permanent humanitarian visas (eligible for FEE-HELP and RTS support)
- Permanent Residents of Australia (eligible for RTS support but not FEE-HELP), or
- New Zealand citizens (eligible for RTS support but not FEE-HELP), or
- students who remain overseas for the course of their studies (e.g. online students)

If an applicant for an MCD award is an overseas student, she or he must be referred to the section [International Students](#) on the MCD website, which provides information on costs and visa requirements. Commonwealth law requires that each overseas student must have a valid visa, must study full time, and must have adequate health cover and English skills.

The MCD requires all overseas research students whose first degree was not studied using English to have achieved the IELTS score relevant to the course for which they are applying, within the first six months of arriving in Australia.

MCD policy permits enrolment of those overseas students only who have the support of both local and Melbourne based ecclesial body: the MCD is not able to take responsibility for housing, personal support or living expenses.

International research students are encouraged to take an active part in the MCD International PG Students' Association.

2 Admissions and Credits

2.1 Admissions procedures

NB: [HDR applications](#) must be signed by the applicant, the agreed Supervisor and a Research Coordinator, in order for them to be processed by the MCD. It is the responsibility of Coordinators to check that all necessary sections are completed, including the required DEEWR information. The applicant must understand what documentation needs to accompany the application and the process of the application once it is submitted to the MCD.

Applications for all HDR degrees must include the name and signature of a potential Supervisor.

The Director will collate valid HDR applications, and circulate summaries, with appropriate information, via email to Research Coordinators. For doctoral candidature application, a hardcopy of the initial thesis proposal will also be circulated.

Responses and recommendations are returned usually by Research Coordinators to the Director, within one working week of circulation:

- With consensus, admission is granted, a Supervisor is appointed, and an approval letter sent to the applicant and the Supervisor, which is then reported to the Research Committee.
- If consensus is not possible, the application is referred to the Committee for consideration.

2.2 Admission to the MTheol under Regulation 7.2.1.3

If an MTheol applicant seeks to enroll under Regulation 7.2.1.3, by completing a 12,000-word postgraduate research essay with distinction, s/he is enrolled in the Graduate Diploma (Special). (Overseas students must enrol full-time in this award; then a single Confirmation of Enrolment is issued for the combined GradDip and MTheol.)

If the essay is completed subsequently with distinction, the student is admitted to the MTheol: the essay may be included as an additional entry on the MTheol transcript or left on that of the GradDip. If the essay is passed, with less than distinction, the student may continue with the GradDip or transfer to the MTS.

2.3 Credits and advanced standing

If an applicant seeks credit or advanced standing, the application must be supported by a Research Coordinator, and be in writing, accompanied by supporting documentation. Normally such applications will come to the Research Committee for consideration.

3 Approval of research proposal, and upgrade or confirmation of candidature

3.1 Masters' candidates: Planning Stage

For those undertaking two coursework units and a minor thesis, all units of study must be approved by the Research Coordinator of the Recognised Teaching Institution in which the candidate is enrolled, prior to being approved by the Director, on behalf of the Committee. A copy of the form used in this process is available for [download](#) from the MCD website. The student is also required to enrol for each unit at the RTI, in which it is offered.

Candidates for the [MA](#), [MMin](#) and [MTheol](#) degrees must submit to the Director a supervised research proposal, which is signed by the candidate and Supervisor, before approval for research can be given. For a major thesis, normally such a submission will take place three months into full-time or six months into part-time candidature. For a minor thesis, such a submission will normally take place within three months of the completion of coursework requirements.

The proposal must be accompanied by a brief, signed statement from the principal Supervisor on the suitability of the proposal and the candidate's capacity to complete the research project within two years.

3.2 Masters' candidates: Approval Panel

The Director will convene an Approval Panel consisting of the Supervisor(s), reader and a Research Coordinator, in person where possible, or by other means. The panel may be held at the candidate's RTI, and managed by the RTI Research Coordinator in consultation with the Director.

The Panel will discuss the submission with the candidate, and determine whether or not he or she should be advanced to research status. Before approval is granted, candidates are required to demonstrate that their capacity in regard to research methodology is appropriate to the proposed project. This is especially important when the research project requires ethical clearance from the MCD Human Research Ethics Committee.

If the Panel grants approval, the candidate advances to research status, which is reported to the Research Committee. When approval is not granted, the Panel may make recommendations for further work which must be completed in order for confirmation, and may refer the matter to the Research Committee.

After the research project has been approved, the candidate must apply to HREC for ethical clearance. *No research involving human subjects, or using records not in the public domain, may commence or proceed without written ethical clearance from HREC.*

3.3 Upgrade from MA or MTheol to doctoral candidature

If an MA or MTheol student wishes to upgrade to doctoral candidature, application must be made on the [Upgrade of Candidature](#) form, accompanied by an outline of reasons for seeking the upgrade and a letter of support from the Supervisor.

In accord with Regulations 9.3 and 22.4 the following procedures apply,

9.3 - Upgrading [to the DTheol] from MTheol candidature

- 9.3.1 A candidate for the degree of Master of Theology may apply to transfer to the degree of Doctor of Theology after a period of candidacy of not less than two semesters of study for a full-time candidate or four semesters of study for a part-time candidate.
- 9.3.2 The applicant must submit a comprehensive research proposal, including written work completed for the Master's degree and a detailed bibliography, together with the written support of a Supervisor approved by the Board.
- 9.3.3 The Board will appoint assessors who will advise the Board as to whether or not the criteria for the upgrading of candidature determined by the Board have been met.
- 9.3.4 If the upgrading of candidature is approved by the Board, candidature will normally be regarded as a continuation of the same program of study and the commencement date of doctoral candidature will be backdated and set at the commencement date of the Master's candidature. In special circumstances the Board may consider and approve an application to back-date the doctoral candidature by a lesser amount.

22.4 - Upgrading [to the PhD] from MA or MTheol candidature

- 22.4.1 A candidate for the degree of Master of Arts or Master of Theology may apply to transfer to confirmed candidature for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy after a period of candidacy in the Master's degree of not less than two semesters for a full-time candidate or four semesters for a part-time candidate.
- 22.4.2 The applicant must submit a comprehensive research proposal, including written work completed for the Master's degree and a detailed bibliography, together with the written support of a Supervisor approved by the Board.
- 22.4.3 The Board will appoint assessors who will advise the Board as to whether or not the criteria for the upgrading of candidature determined by the Board have been met.
- 22.4.4 If the upgrade of candidature is approved by the Board, candidature will normally be regarded as a continuation of the same program of study and the commencement date for doctoral candidature will be backdated and set at the commencement date of the Master's candidature. In special circumstances the Board may consider and approve an application to back-date the doctoral candidature by a lesser amount.

NB: 'the Board' in these Regulations refers to the Academic Board, which has delegated this work to the Research Committee.

The Director convenes an Upgrade Panel to meet with the candidate, consisting of the Director, Supervisor(s) and at least two academics with relevant expertise. The candidate submits a detailed research proposal, timeline, bibliography, and one or two chapters of completed work (8-12,000 words), copies of which are provided to each Panel member to read prior to the meeting.

The Panel will discuss the work undertaken with the candidate, and determine whether or not the topic is suitable for doctoral research, whether the candidate is capable of completing it within the timeframe set down in the Regulations, and if the MCD can provide adequate library resources and supervision. If the Panel decides positively, the candidate is upgraded to doctoral status, which is reported to the Research Committee. If approval is not given, the candidate may continue with

research at Master's level. The Panel may make recommendations for further work which could be done to upgrade to doctoral level, and may refer the matter to the Research Committee.

3.4 Doctoral candidates: Probationary Candidature

In accord with Regulations 8.3, 9.3 and 21.3, MCD doctoral students are enrolled as probationary candidates until a research proposal is submitted and approved. Normally such a submission will take place after the completion of qualifying, Comprehensive Assessment and required coursework (DMinStuds), or 12 months full-time or equivalent part-time probationary candidature (DTheol, PhD).

DMinStuds candidates must submit to the Director a signed [supervised research proposal](#), detailing the methodology and bibliography. PhD and DTheol candidates must include a substantial amount of the written work completed to date (normally 10-12,000 words) before submitting the [Request for Confirmation](#).

The research proposal must be accompanied by a brief, signed statement from the principal Supervisor with an opinion on the suitability, and on the candidate's capacity to complete the research project within three years (full-time) or six years (part-time).

3.5 Doctoral candidates: Confirmation Panel

The Director convenes a [Confirmation Panel](#) to meet with the candidate, consisting of the Supervisor(s), the Director and at least two academics with relevant expertise. Each Panel member is provided with copies of the submission and written work so that these can be read prior to the meeting.

Confirmation Panels discuss the submission with the candidate, and determine whether or not candidature should be confirmed, based on the materials submitted and the candidate's participation in the Panel meeting. When the decision is positive, the candidate advances to research status which is reported to the Research Committee. If this is not the case, the Panel may make recommendations for further work which could be done for confirmation. The matter may be referred to the Research Committee. When the Research Committee determines the doctoral candidature cannot be confirmed, the Committee may recommend that the candidate transfer to master's candidature.

If the research project is approved, the candidate must apply to HREC for ethical clearance. *No research involving human subjects, or using records not in the public domain, may commence or proceed without written ethical clearance from HREC.*

4 Student progress

4.1 Annual Report Form

Each candidate for a Higher Degree by Research must submit an [Annual Report Form](#) to their Supervisor(s), in sufficient time for the form to be completed and signed by both the candidate and the Supervisor(s), and returned to the Director by the last Friday in September.

Candidates may wish to make changes in their approved supervised research projects, as a result of this review.

4.2 Changes to research projects

If candidates wish to make changes to their approved research project and their Supervisors believe these changes are significant, a revised research proposal must be made to the Director, and be approved by the Research Committee. This is especially important for Ministry Studies candidates.

Other changes, including modifications to the title without substantial changes in research method or focus, do not require approval, but must be notified to the Director and then reported to the Committee.

4.3 Leave of absence

Each MCD degree has a time limit for completion set by Regulation: these limits give realistic indication of the time needed normally to complete a research project. Candidates for Higher Degrees by Research are expected to comply with all MCD Regulations in completing their research projects.

Candidates who wish to apply for leave of absence must have the consent of their Supervisor, and submit the [standard form](#), signed by the candidate and Research Coordinator, at least one month prior to the leave being taken, accompanied by a statement of reasons. When leave is requested for more than one semester, full written documentation supporting the application must be provided.

The Director may grant initial leave of absence for no more than one year; application for further leave of absence must be considered by the Research Committee.

4.4 Extension of candidature

Candidates who seek extension of time for the submission of their thesis must have the consent of their Supervisor, and submit the [standard form](#), signed by the candidate and Research Coordinator, at least two months prior to the end of the normal period of candidature. The form must be accompanied by a statement of reasons or circumstances leading to the application, and a letter of support from the Supervisor. Extensions of time beyond 25% of the original length allowed must be supported by written documentation.

The Director may grant initial extension of candidature of no more than six months; any further application for extension must be considered by the Research Committee.

5 Appointment of Examiners

Normally three months prior to the likely date of submission, the principal Supervisor submits a [Nomination of Examiners](#) form to the Director, including at least five names, in order of preference. The candidate has the right to exclude any person(s) from being an examiner.

NB: It is standard MCD practice to have a balance of ecclesial background and scholarly approach among the examiners, and in the case of doctoral candidates, for at least one examiner to be an overseas scholar: these factors should be taken into account in making recommendations.

The candidate submits to the Director electronically an abstract (up to 80 words) of the thesis, to assist the Research Committee in considering the appointment of examiners, and to assist persons requested to act as examiners consider the request.

The Director presents the names of the recommended examiners to the Research Committee for appointment of an approved list, in order of preference. The Committee will be guided by, but not beholden to, the nominations of the Supervisor, and must not appoint an examiner excluded by the candidate or by Regulation 26.3.3.

When examiners whose names were not included on the Nomination of Examiners form, are nominated by the Committee, the Director should discuss this matter informally with the Supervisor. If the list of approved examiners is exhausted, the Director must consult with the Supervisor in order to submit further names to the Committee for consideration.

6 Submission and examination of the Thesis

6.1 Format

The Thesis must follow the requirements of Regulation 26.2, and when accepted, Regulation 26.6.

Theses submitted for examination may be either on single-sided or double-sided A4 paper of sufficient weight (at least 80gsm), in temporary binding, with margins of at least 2cm all round, typed either 1.5 or double-spaced (consistently throughout) except for long quotations which may

be single-spaced. The thesis must include a statement signed by the candidate stating that, apart from acknowledgements indicated, the thesis is the work of the candidate.

A document outlining a recommended thesis structure is available separately.

6.2 Submission processes

When a thesis is submitted, the following forms, completed and signed by both candidate and Supervisor must be included:

- a) [Supervisor's Certification of Thesis.](#)
- b) [Thesis Submission form.](#)

These forms are available from the MCD website.

The MCD office will not forward the thesis to examiners if tuition fees remain unpaid.

6.3 Examination

Examiners are asked to complete their work within two months (masters) or three months (doctorates) of receiving the thesis. If after four months the Director has not received the report of an examiner, the MCD may request the examiner to return the thesis and invite another examinee, selected from the approved list, to act.

The examination of the thesis must take place in accordance with Regulation 26, Examination of Theses. This Regulation specifies the following process:

- 26.3.1 After considering the Thesis [again, why caps here and not consistently throughout?], each examiner is to report in writing to the Chair of Examiners, stating whether they recommend that the Thesis
 - 26.3.4.1 be accepted, only conditional upon minor grammatical or typographical errors being corrected to the satisfaction of the Supervisor;
 - 26.3.4.2 be accepted, conditional upon revisions being made to the satisfaction of the Board, but without re-examination;
 - 26.3.4.3 not be accepted, but be permitted to be revised and submitted for re-examination by those examiners who deemed that it needed rewriting;
 - 26.3.4.4 not be accepted, and not be permitted to be submitted for re-examination.The examiners may, in addition, submit a conjoint report.
- 26.3.5 No Thesis is to be passed unless it is deemed to be of Honours standard. In considering a recommendation made under sub-clauses 26.3.4.1 or 26.3.4.2, each examiner is to indicate whether a Master's Major or Minor Thesis should be graded with First Class, Second Class (Upper) or Second Class (Lower) Honours.
- 26.3.6 Normally no candidate is permitted to submit a revised Thesis for re-examination more than once.

26.4 - The Chair of Examiners

The Chair of Examiners is to consider the written reports of the examiners, and proceed as follows:

- 26.4.1 Where the Chair of Examiners recommends that the Thesis not be accepted, this conclusion is to be notified in writing to the Board.
- 26.4.2 Where the Chair of Examiners recommends that the candidate be required by the examiners to revise and resubmit the thesis for re-examination, this conclusion is to be notified to the Board in writing, specifying what revisions sought by the examiners are necessary, and what maximum time for re-submission is recommended.
- 26.4.3 Where the Chair of Examiners recommends that the Thesis be accepted, possibly subject to amendments being made but without further examination being necessary, this conclusion is to be notified to the Board in writing, specifying what revisions (if any) may be necessary, and (if applicable) what level of Honours is recommended.

26.4.4 Where the Chair of Examiners is unable to make a clear recommendation based upon the examiners' reports, the Chair may ask the examiners to consult, recommend to the Board the appointment of additional examiner(s), or take such other steps as may enable a clear recommendation to be made.

26.4.5 Following receipt of the written report of the Chair of Examiners, the Board must inform the candidate and the Supervisor in writing of the recommendation of the Chair of Examiners, and forward copies of the written reports of the examiners and of the Chair of Examiners.

NB: 'the Board' in Regulations 26.3 and 26.4 refers to the Academic Board, which has delegated the work of these sections (except 26.4.5) to the Research Committee. The written report of the Chair of Examiners comes to the Committee for consideration, and the Committee then makes a recommendation to the Academic Board regarding the award of a degree. Only the Academic Board can make a recommendation to the Council for the award of a degree.

6.4 Oral Defence

When an Oral Defence forms part of the examination process, as for the DMinStuds, the examiners' questions to the candidate are included in their written report. The Chair of Examiners must initially decide, on the basis of the examiners' reports, whether an Oral Defence is warranted, ie the Thesis comes under Regulation 26.3.4.1 or 26.3.4.2.

When the Chair of Examiners recommends the Oral Defence proceed, it must be held within reasonable proximity to the time of the decision of the Chair of Examiners, and in a location which facilitates easy communication between the examiners and the candidate, and which has sufficient space for members of the public to attend. Relevant equipment such as an overhead projector, data projector or audio system will be made available, if requested.

The Oral Defence Panel and the Chair are appointed by the Research Committee, and must include the candidate's Supervisor and two examiners of the thesis. If an examiner is unable to be present at the Oral Defence, the significant points raised by the non-present examiner of the written thesis will be put to the candidate by one of the members of the Oral Defence Panel, who would be normally the Chair of the Panel,; however, the Committee may appoint a specific person for this role.

Oral Defences are organised by the Director, in consultation with the appropriate Research Coordinator. The Director writes to the candidate no later than two weeks prior to the date of the Defence, advising him or her of the questions that the examiners have established, to be raised during the Oral Defence.

NB: candidates do not see the examiners' reports prior to the Oral Defence.

Candidates provide the Director with an abstract of their thesis of no more than 1000 words, which will be used as the basis of their presentation. The Director arranges for copies to be available for members of the public who attend the Oral Defence.

At the Oral Defence, the candidate will be expected to show not only a detailed knowledge of the research area, and respond to the questions and issues raised by the examiners, as well as demonstrate an *integration* of the research with his or her ongoing professional and /or research responsibilities.

As the Oral Defence is a public event, observers have the opportunity to ask questions of the candidate. The Oral Defence will take the following form:

- ◆ 5 minute introduction by the candidate, speaking specifically to or from the abstract
- ◆ 45 minute questioning by the panel of examiners
- ◆ 10 minute questioning from the floor

The Chair of the Panel is responsible for keeping strict control of the proceedings. The Chair may give preference to questions from the Panel, rather than from the floor, depending on the time available.

Immediately following the Oral Defence, the Chair will write on behalf of the Panel, to the Chair of Examiners, making recommendations on the proposed award of the degree or otherwise, specifying the revisions that may be necessary for the degree to be awarded. At the discretion of the Chair of the Panel, the candidate may be informed immediately of the proposed recommendations.

6.5 Recommendations after the Examination

The Chair of Examiners, taking account of both the written reports of the examiners and where applicable, of the Oral Defence Panel, will recommend to the Research Committee whether the degree shall be awarded, indicating what revisions may be necessary.

When the Research Committee decides not to recommend the awarding of the degree, the candidate, Supervisor and Examiners must be informed in writing immediately.

When the Committee recommends the awarding of the degree, the candidate and Supervisor may be given an indication of the outcome informally. Formal notification must be made only when the Academic Board has recommended the award of the degree to the Council. Examiners are informed in writing of the outcome once the Council has accepted the recommendation of the Academic Board to award the degree.

Examiners' Reports are confidential. Until the examination has been completed, they are available only to examiners, the Director, and the Chair of Examiners. After the Council has accepted the recommendation to award the degree, copies of the reports are provided to the candidate and the Supervisor, unless an examiner specifies otherwise about his or her own report. The candidate has exclusive control over any further distribution of Examiners' Reports. The originals remain in the MCD files, as confidential documents with access restricted to the Director and the Registrar.

7 Lodgement of Theses

Following the Council's decision to award a research degree, and *prior* to the degree being conferred, the candidate must submit to the MCD Registrar:

- a) Three copies bound in accord with Regulation 26.6.3: one will be lodged in the Dalton McCaughey Library, one will be held at the MCD office, and the third will be lodged in a library of the candidate's choice. If the candidate wants to lodge the third copy personally, a letter of receipt must be obtained from the library concerned, and sent to the MCD Registrar; if the third copy is submitted to the MCD Registrar, then the name of the library for lodgement must be included at the time of submission.
- b) One electronic copy, preferably in PDF format (Print level) but Word or RTF is acceptable, for lodgement in the Dalton McCaughey Library and for online access.
- c) An Abstract of up to 150 words, together with up to a dozen keywords (chosen so that electronic searching for topics will bring up relevant choices for researchers). Two copies of the Abstract and keywords must be submitted: one hard copy and one electronic copy. For doctoral candidates, for whom an Abstract is read aloud at conferral, two versions of the Abstract may be provided, one for conferral (no more than 50 words) and another for publication in *Pacifica*, but they must be wholly consistent with one another.
- d) Confidentiality of Thesis form signed by the candidate

(Approved by the Research Committee December 2006; incorporating minor revisions after the Research Committee meetings of 15 February 2007, 19 April 2007, 5 June, 2007 and 31 July 2008)