

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Recommended examination policies and procedures for PhD degrees

Definition of terms:

The definitions of terms provided in the *General Academic Rules and Rules for Students* (pp.1-4) apply, with the following additions:

1. **“thesis”** refers to the supervised research component of all PhD degrees, whether by supervised research only, or coursework and research, or by papers that are either published or in manuscript form (the supervised research component of the PhD degree by paper(s) comprises the introduction, literature review, account of the methodology, selection of manuscripts, and conclusion).
2. **“supervisor”** is someone who is teaching by example and by instruction and includes also **co-supervisor(s)**.
3. **“internal examination”** means examination by a person who is a member of the University academic staff (including persons who hold honorary appointments in the University) other than the supervisor(s).
4. **“external examination”** means examination by a person, external to the University, who has not been involved with teaching at the University during the previous three (3) years. A former member of the University who has resigned from the University and joined another institution may thus be eligible to be appointed as external examiner after three years, provided that this former member has not been involved with any teaching, supervision, research project or other activities related to the dissertation or its subject area.
5. **“international external examiner”** is someone external to the University, and from outside of South Africa, who has not been involved with teaching at the University during the previous three (3) years. A former member of the University who has resigned from the University and joined another institution outside of South Africa may thus be eligible to be appointed as external examiner after three years, provided that this former member has not been involved with any teaching, supervision, research project or other activities related to the dissertation or its subject area.
6. **“external moderator”** is an academic expert external to the University who is asked to consider all the relevant evidence concerning a student's thesis examination, and to arbitrate and provide a recommendation as to the award of the degree.
7. The term **“Faculty Postgraduate Office”** is used to refer to the Faculty Office section responsible for the administration of higher degrees and postgraduate students.

Examination procedures for PhD theses:

1 General:

- 1.1 The following examination procedures apply to the supervised research component of all the following PhD degrees:
 - by thesis only
 - by coursework and thesis
 - by papers, published or unpublished
 - by performance and thesis
 - by creative work and thesis
- 1.2 All examination procedures for all PhD degrees must be conducted at Faculty level and not at School level. No distinction must be made between examination procedures for PhD degrees by thesis only and PhD degrees by coursework, performance, papers or creative work and thesis.
- 1.3 These procedures constitute minimum best practice and must be adhered to. Faculties may further restrict and strengthen these procedures to suit their own particular disciplinary needs, but the general principles must be adhered to.

2. Notice of intention to submit a thesis for examination

- 2.1 At least three months before the thesis is to be submitted for examination, a student must give notice, in writing, to the Postgraduate Office of the Faculty concerned of the intention to submit it, and provide also the title of the thesis as well as a short research overview not exceeding 350 words.
- 2.2 At the same time, the supervisor must be informed, by the student or the Faculty Postgraduate Office, of the student's intention to submit the thesis for examination.
- 2.3 In the event of a student failing to submit the thesis for examination within six months of having given notice of intention to submit, the notice will lapse and a further notice of intention must be submitted.
- 2.4 When notice of intention to submit a thesis for examination is given, the Faculty Postgraduate Office must confirm the following:
 - (i) that the student is properly registered;
 - (ii) that the research proposal has been accepted by the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee. No thesis will be sent out for examination unless the research proposal has been accepted at least two semesters before submission;

- (iii) that the necessary research ethics clearance has been granted prior to commencement of the research. No thesis will be sent out for examination if the project has not received prior ethics clearance.
- 2.5 As soon as notice of intention to submit a thesis for examination is given, the Faculty Postgraduate Office must request that examiners be nominated by the School and the Faculty Office must administer their appointment.
- 3. Appointment of examiners:**
- 3.1 Three examiners must be nominated by the School: normally one internal to the University who is not the supervisor of the thesis, and two external examiners of which at least one should be an international external examiner (from outside of South Africa). Any exceptions should be motivated to the Faculty Higher Degrees committee.
 - 3.2 Examiners must be nominated by the Head of School in consultation with the supervisor and, where relevant, the Academic Coordinator, other specialists in the discipline or area of research, and/or the School Higher Degrees Committee. Students may be asked to indicate, with motivation, two examiners they would not like to examine their thesis for reasons of conflict of interest.
 - 3.3 Students may not know the names of their examiners until after they have completed the degree, and subject to the examiners' consent.
 - 3.4 Examiners must be appointed independently of each other and their names may not be disclosed to each other.
 - 3.5 The Head of School must establish, prior to nomination, whether the examiners are willing and able to do the examination. The Head of School also needs to establish with the examiner whether there is any conflict of interest, whether s/he knows the student, and how many times the examiner has examined for that supervisor.
 - 3.6 The Head of School must submit the names of the examiners, together with their qualifications, an abridged *curriculum vitae*, and their full contact details (street address, telephone and fax numbers, email address) to the Faculty Postgraduate Office for submission to the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee. The Head of School must also declare whether s/he is aware of any conflict of interest among the examiners, student or supervisor and must indicate any relationship an examiner may have with the student and/or supervisor. A standard, prescribed Appointment of Examiners form must be used for this purpose.
 - 3.7 Normally, all examiners of PhD theses must be in possession of a doctoral degree. A single exception may be permitted in cases where specialist professional or technical expertise in the field is required and must be fully motivated in these terms.
 - 3.8 The nominated examiners must be approved by the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee or equivalent.

- 3.9 The Faculty Higher Degrees Committee must recommend the examiners it has approved to Faculty Board for appointment. The Dean may be delegated to appoint examiners executively and report verbally to Board. For the sake of confidentiality, the names of the examiners should not appear on the Faculty Board agenda or minutes, only the name of the student and the discipline.
- 3.10 All supporting documentation for the appointment of the examiners must be retained on file in the Faculty Postgraduate Office.
- 3.11 An examination panel must be appointed by the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee simultaneously with the approval of examiners. The examination panel is to be convened in the case of major discrepancies between examiners' reports. The examination panel must consist of 3 academic members of staff, normally
- (i) the Chair of the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee or his/her nominee,
 - (ii) the relevant Head of School, or another senior academic member of staff from the School if the Head of School is either supervisor or examiner of the thesis, and
 - (iii) another senior academic from that or a related discipline

This examination panel may be a permanent sub-committee of the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee with membership as set out above and populated according to the School from which the thesis has originated.

- 3.12 The Faculty Postgraduate Office is responsible for sending the official letters of appointment to the examiners, requesting their confirmation of acceptance of appointment within two weeks, and receiving and recording their acceptances.

4. Submission of theses for examination:

- 4.1 Candidates must submit three soft-bound, paper copies of their thesis, as well as an electronic copy in pdf format, directly to the Faculty Postgraduate Office: one paper copy for each of the examiners. The electronic copy must be retained in the Faculty Postgraduate Office and may be made available to examiners should they so wish.
- 4.2 Each copy of the thesis must be signed and dated by the student and supervisor.
- 4.3 The following sentence must appear on page 1 of the thesis:
"As the candidate's Supervisor I agree/do not agree to the submission of this thesis."
- 4.4 *Plagiarism:*
Each thesis must contain the following declaration by the candidate:

DECLARATION

I declare that

- (i) The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original work.
- (ii) This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
- (iii) This thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
- (iv) This thesis does not contain other persons' writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted, then:
 - a) their words have been re-written but the general information attributed to them has been referenced;
 - b) where their exact words have been used, their writing has been placed inside quotation marks, and referenced.
- (v) Where I have reproduced a publication of which I am author, co-author or editor, I have indicated in detail which part of the publication was actually written by myself alone and have fully referenced such publications.
- (vi) This thesis does not contain text, graphics or tables copied and pasted from the Internet, unless specifically acknowledged, and the source being detailed in the thesis and in the References sections.

Signed:

5. Supervisor's report:

- 5.1 Upon submission of the thesis, the supervisor(s) must furnish a report on the conduct of the student's work.
- 5.2 The supervisor's report should essentially be descriptive and non-evaluative, and should briefly cover the following:
 - (i) The duration of the project and its supervision: when it was first registered and when the supervision began;
 - (ii) Give brief details of assistance given to the candidate during their research (include period from formulation of research topic to writing up of research and finalization of thesis)
 - (iii) The extent to which the collection of data, the solution of problems, deductions and critical discussion have resulted from the candidate's own efforts, or from discussion between the candidate and the supervisor;
 - (iv) What resource constraints or opportunities, or equipment problems, there might have been that impacted on the research;

- (v) What assistance has been given to the student regarding matters of expression, style and general presentation;
- (vi) Whether there is any particular information that the examiners need to be aware of;
- (vii) Whether the supervisor has seen and approved of the entire final draft of the thesis;
- (viii) Whether the supervisor is satisfied that, to the best of his/her knowledge, there is no plagiarism in the thesis.

Co-supervisors should co-sign on one report.

- 5.3 Faculties should provide guidelines for writing a supervisor's report to suit their particular disciplinary needs.
- 5.4 The supervisor's report should not be sent to the examiners but must be retained in the student's file and made available to the coordinating examiner(s) when the coordinating examination is done.
- 5.5 Should a student wish to submit a thesis against the advice of the supervisor, this should be recorded in the supervisor's report.
- 5.6 The supervisor's report is the only contribution that the supervisor may make to the examination process; the supervisor must not communicate further with the examiners.

6. Examination:

- 6.1 It is the responsibility of the Faculty Postgraduate Office to administer the entire examination of the submitted thesis.
- 6.2 The Faculty Postgraduate Office must send the thesis by courier or registered internal mail to Examiners.
- 6.3 Examiners must be given a period of 6 weeks within which to submit their examination reports.
- 6.4 The following documentation must be supplied to the examiners for completion and return (examination forms and guidelines for examiners may be drawn up by Faculties to suit their particular disciplinary needs):
 - (i) PhD thesis examination form/ questionnaire
 - (ii) Guidelines for examiners of doctoral theses
 - (iii) Copy of the thesis
 - (iv) Claim form
 - (v) Postcard/ email to acknowledge receipt and supply anticipated date of submission of report.

- 6.5 All correspondence with examiners must only be done by the Faculty Postgraduate Office.
- 6.6 Strict confidentiality must be maintained by all parties involved in the examination process. Examiners may not consult with one another; but if they need to consult with the Head of School they may do so only through the Faculty Postgraduate Office.
- 6.7 Examiners are required to complete the relevant PhD thesis examination form/questionnaire as well as write a comprehensive, separate report on the work.
- 6.8 Examiners must make one of the following recommendations:
- (i) The thesis should be *accepted*, without any corrections or revisions.
 - (ii) The thesis should be *accepted*, provided certain corrections and revisions/extensions are carried out, to be approved by the Supervisor and Head of School.
 - (iii) The thesis requires substantive revision/ extension by the candidate and *should not be accepted* in its present form. It should be returned to the candidate for revision/ extension and then be resubmitted for examination.
 - (iv) The thesis should be *rejected outright*.

In the cases of recommendations (ii) and (iii), the corrections, revisions and extensions required to make the thesis acceptable for the award of the PhD degree must be explained in detail in the examination reports.

In the case of recommendation (iii), the examiner should indicate willingness to re-examine.

In the case of recommendation (iv), a detailed and comprehensive motivation must be provided.

For the case of a PhD thesis no mark is awarded.

- 6.9 Examiners must be asked whether they agree to their names being divulged to candidates after the award of the degree.
- 6.10 Examiners must submit their completed examination forms/ questionnaires and reports directly and *only* to the Faculty Postgraduate Office.
- 6.11 On return of the examiners' reports to the Faculty Postgraduate Office, copies of the forms/ questionnaires and reports must be forwarded to the relevant Head of School requesting him/her to write a coordinating examiner's report. The Head of School may, in consultation with the Deputy/Assistant Dean (Postgraduate Studies), delegate this to another appropriate senior member of the School.
- 6.12 In the case of the Head of School having been either the supervisor or examiner of the thesis, the Deputy Dean (Postgraduate Studies) must be requested to write a coordinating examination report.

- 6.13 The coordinating examiner must evaluate the examination reports and, *where the examiners are in general agreement* in their assessments of the thesis, make one of the following recommendations in the coordinating report: that the thesis should
- (i) be *accepted*, without any corrections or revisions;
 - (ii) be *accepted*, provided corrections and revisions/ extensions are carried out to the satisfaction of the supervisor and Head of School;
 - (iii) *should not be accepted*, but should be returned to the candidate for substantive revision/ extension and then be resubmitted for examination;
 - (iv) should be *rejected outright*.

In the cases of recommendations (ii) and (iii) the coordinating examination report must clearly direct the student and supervisor to the corrections, revisions and extensions specified by the examiners in their examination reports as a requirement for making the thesis acceptable for the award of the PhD degree.

In the case of recommendation (iv), a detailed and comprehensive motivation must be provided.

- 6.14 *Where there is any disagreement among examiners*, however, and the Head of School compiling the co-ordinating examiner's report cannot make a firm recommendation, the examination panel previously constituted (or where this is feasible, the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee) must be convened by the Deputy Dean of Postgraduate Studies to discuss the examiners' reports and make a recommendation as outlined in 6.13 above. The Faculty Postgraduate Office will provide copies of the examiners' reports to members of the examination panel.

The Chair of the examination panel may consult with the supervisor or the examiners.

In cases of a major discrepancy between the examiners' assessments of the thesis that the examination panel cannot reconcile, the panel may call for a fourth examiner from the Head of School and this examiner must be requested to submit an independent examination report. The fourth examiner must also be appointed by the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee (this may be done executively by the Chair of the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee or the Deputy Dean (Postgraduate Studies)), and the appointment subsequently confirmed by the Dean and forwarded to the Faculty Board for ratification.

The same examination procedures as outlined above in 6.1 to 6.10 apply when a fourth examiner is appointed and requested to submit an examination report.

In instances deemed necessary by the Higher Degrees Committee or the Examination Panel, instead of re-examination an external moderator may be appointed (in the same way as a fourth examiner). The external moderator must be supplied with the examiners' reports and any other relevant documentation and be asked to consider all the relevant evidence and to arbitrate and provide a recommendation as to the award of the degree.

The chair of the examination panel should then write up the coordinating report in the light of all four examination reports, and a recommendation made as in 6.13 above.

- 6.15 *Oral examination/ defence of the dissertation:* On the recommendation of the examination panel, candidates may be required to submit themselves to an oral examination and given the opportunity to defend the thesis and respond to questions concerning the conceptualisation, design, execution or interpretation of the research. The oral examination panel will normally consist of the members of the examination panel (chaired by the Deputy Dean (Postgraduate Studies)/ Chair of the Higher Degrees Committee), the supervisor (for consultation), and as many of the examiners as deemed necessary.

The chair of the examination panel should then write up the coordinating report in the light of the outcome of the oral examination, and make a recommendation as in 6.13 above.

Faculties may exercise the option to conduct an oral examination/ defence of the dissertation, or include this as a standard part of their examination process.

- 6.16 The coordinating examiner must submit the coordinating examination report to the Faculty Postgraduate Office, retaining the copies of the examination reports.
- 6.17 The Faculty Postgraduate Office must then send the coordinating examination report, together with all the examination reports, to the Deputy Dean (Postgraduate Studies) for approval and, in the case of a successful examination outcome, recommendation of the award of the degree, subject to any conditions.
- 6.18 In the event of the coordinating report having been done by the Deputy Dean (Postgraduate Studies), or by an examination panel chaired by the Deputy Dean, the coordinating examination report must be referred to the Dean for approval and, in the case of a successful examination outcome, recommendation of the award of the degree, subject to any conditions.
- 6.19 The Deputy Dean's (or Dean's) written approval of the coordinating report and recommendation of the award of the degree, together with the coordinating report, must be submitted to the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee for ratification.
- 6.20 The Faculty Postgraduate Office must inform the Head of School and the supervisor of the outcome of the examination, and send the supervisor copies of the coordinating report and examiners' reports.
- 6.21 The names of the examiners should be expunged from the examiners' reports when they are made available to the student by the supervisor for corrections and revisions to be done (the student should not know the identity of an examiner).
- 6.22 Where acceptance of the thesis is conditional on completion of corrections or revisions, these must be done to the satisfaction of the supervisor as well as the

Head of School. In cases where the Head of School is either the supervisor or an examiner, the corrections and revisions must be also done to the satisfaction of the coordinating examiner. The student shall be required to provide a written report on exactly how the recommendations and requirements of the examiners have been addressed in the correction and revision of the thesis. The supervisor and Head of School must confirm in writing to the Faculty Postgraduate Office that the corrections and revisions as stipulated in the coordinating examiner's report have been effected to their satisfaction. If corrections and revisions have not been completed within six months, the examination will be deemed as failed.

- 6.23 *Re-examination:* Where one or more examiners have required that the thesis be revised and/or extended and resubmitted for examination (coordinating report recommendation (iv) above), this needs to be done under the guidance of the supervisor, and the student must re-register for the duration of the revision process, a maximum of one further semester.

The supervisor must draw up clear guidelines for the student, based on the examiners' requirements and recommendations and the directives in the coordinating report, for correction, revision and extension of the thesis.

When the student and supervisor are both satisfied that these have been satisfactorily executed, the supervisor must write a second supervisor's report explaining exactly how the recommendations and requirements of the examiners have been addressed in the revised thesis.

The examination procedures outlined above in 5.4 to 6.7 apply to the re-examination of a thesis.

Examiners must make one of the following recommendations in the re-examination report:

- (i) The thesis should now be *accepted*, without any further corrections or revisions.
- (ii) The thesis should now be *accepted*, provided certain corrections and revisions/ extensions are carried out, to be approved by the Supervisor and Head of School.
- (iii) The thesis should now be *rejected outright*.

In the cases of recommendation (ii), the corrections, revisions and extensions required to make the thesis finally acceptable must be explained in detail in the examination reports.

No thesis may be resubmitted for examination a second time. If the thesis is still unacceptable for the award of the degree, recommendation (iii) must be made. In this case, a detailed and comprehensive motivation must be provided.

The re-examination report(s) must then be forwarded to the coordinating examiner for a second and final coordinating examination report to be done in the light of all four examination reports. The coordinating examiner must make one of the following recommendations: that the thesis should now be

- (i) *accepted*, without any corrections or revisions;
- (ii) *accepted*, provided corrections and revisions are carried out to the satisfaction of the supervisor and Head of School;
- (iii) *rejected outright*.

In the cases of recommendation (ii), the corrections and revisions required by the examiners to make the thesis finally acceptable must be clearly specified in the final coordinating report for forwarding later to the supervisor and student.

In the case of recommendation (iii), a detailed and comprehensive motivation must be provided in the final coordinating report.

The same procedures as outlined above in 6.15 to 6.21 then apply.

- 6.24 The supervisor and Head of School must confirm in writing to the Faculty Postgraduate Office that the corrections and revisions have been done to their satisfaction
- 6.25 The award of the degree must be recommended by the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee to Faculty Board for support, and sent to Academic Affairs Board for final approval. The completion of the degree requirements may then be entered on ITS. The required number of bound copies of the corrected thesis and the electronic copy must be submitted to the Faculty Postgraduate Office before the student can graduate.
- 6.26 A letter must be sent to the student by the Deputy Dean (Postgraduate Studies) or the Faculty Postgraduate Office informing him/her of the award of the PhD degree.
- 6.27 The names of the examiners may be made known to the student only in the event of a successful examination and with the express consent of the examiners.
- 6.28 The Faculty Postgraduate Office may then include the student's name in the upcoming graduation list.
- 6.29 No student shall have the PhD degree conferred unless all the requirements for completion of the degree have been met.