

New Higher Doctorate Policy: Explanatory memorandum



Introduction

A new Higher Doctorate Policy is proposed to address a gap in the University's policy framework. A working group, chaired by the President of the Academic Board, was established to develop a policy governing the award of higher doctorates. The working group includes representatives from the Higher Degrees by Research Committee (HDRC), Graduate Research, Student and Scholarly Services (SASS), faculties, and academic governance – ensuring broad consultation and expertise.

Background

A higher doctorate recognises an internationally significant original contribution to knowledge, consistent with the standards of Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Level 10. This contribution is typically demonstrated through a significant body of published work reflecting sustained scholarly excellence and impact.

Unlike the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), which is awarded for supervised original research, a higher doctorate recognises a candidate's authoritative standing in their discipline, usually established over many years of independent scholarship. The standard for a higher doctorate surpasses the standard required for a supervised doctoral degree (research).

The previous iteration of the Graduate Research Training Policy (MPF1321) referred to the dean's responsibility for overseeing higher doctorate examinations. In the revised MPF1321, higher doctorates are now explicitly excluded from its scope. In the absence of a University-wide policy, higher doctorates are governed at the faculty level. This has led to considerable variation in eligibility criteria, application processes and examination procedures across the institution. These inconsistencies raise concerns around transparency, equity, and administrative efficiency, highlighting the need for a University-wide framework aligned with sector benchmarks.

Consultation

Initial engagement was undertaken through the Committee of Graduate Research Associate Deans (CGRAD) to assist in refining the draft policy. HDRC also provided preliminary feedback to help shape the policy ahead of broader consultation.

This University-wide consultation period now invites feedback from the wider community to further refine and finalise the new Higher Doctorate Policy.

Implementation

Subject to Academic Board approval, the new policy is proposed to take effect from 1 January 2026.

Feedback

Feedback can be provided via email to acad-policy@unimelb.edu.au.

Authorised by

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