

Higher Doctorate Policy (MPFxxxx)

1. Objective

1.1. This policy establishes the requirements for the admission, examination and award of higher doctorates at the University.

2. Scope

2.1. This policy applies to:

- a) all higher doctorate courses offered by the University:
 - i. Doctor of Laws (LLD)
 - ii. Doctor of Letters (DLitt)
 - iii. Doctor of Science (DSc)
- b) all applicants and candidates for a higher doctorate degree, and
- c) all employees and external persons involved in relevant decision-making processes, such as external examiners.

3. Authority

3.1. This policy is made under the [University of Melbourne Act 2009 \(Vic\)](#) and the [Academic Board Regulation](#) and supports compliance with the:

- a) *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011*
- b) Australian Qualifications Framework
- c) *Higher Education Standards Framework 2021*.

4. Policy

Principles

4.1. A higher doctorate may be awarded in recognition of an original, substantial and distinguished contribution to a relevant field, demonstrated through a body of work that reflects outstanding scholarship and international eminence. The standard for a higher doctorate surpasses the standard required for a supervised doctoral degree (research).

4.2. Higher doctorates are awarded based on a substantial body of original scholarly work completed prior to admission. Higher doctorates are assessed solely through examination of the submitted work, without supervision or coursework requirements.

4.3. Proposals to establish, amend or discontinue higher doctorate courses must follow the University's course approval process, as outlined in the Courses, Subjects, Awards and Programs Policy ([MPF1327](#)).

5. Procedural principles

Eligibility

5.1. An applicant for a higher doctorate must:

- a) have held a bachelor or masters degree for at least seven years, or
- b) have held a doctoral degree for at least ten years, and

- c) have a substantial, demonstrable association with the University.

Award requirements

5.2. To qualify for the award of a higher doctorate, the body of work submitted must evidence:

- a) authoritative standing and international eminence in the candidate's field of research, and
- b) a sustained, significant and original contribution to scholarship.

Nomination and application

Stage 1 - Faculty nomination and endorsement

5.3. The higher doctorate application process is initiated by an academic from the relevant faculty (the sponsor), who submits a formal nomination to the dean in a manner prescribed by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (PVC) for Graduate Research.

5.4. The sponsor must have sufficient familiarity with the applicant's scholarly work and field of research to make an informed recommendation. By submitting the nomination, the sponsor affirms that the applicant's body of work may warrant the award of a higher doctorate.

5.5. If the nomination is accepted by the dean, the applicant will be invited to submit a formal application – constituting a prima facie case for the award of the higher doctorate – to the dean of the relevant faculty for review.

5.6. The applicant will be provided with the requirements for the application, which must include:

- a) a current curriculum vitae that includes:
 - i. a full list of the applicant's scholarly outputs
 - ii. the names, qualifications or professional status and contact details of three referees who are not employed by the University, and who have sufficient knowledge of the applicant's scholarly work and field of research
- b) an overview of the body of work to be submitted for examination, presented in sufficient detail to indicate its scope, substance and significance
- c) a concise statement of how the work to be submitted has, over a sustained period, established that the applicant has authoritative standing and international eminence in their respective field.

5.7. The dean may require the applicant to provide further information to clarify any aspect of the application.

5.8. The dean will assess the application and either:

- a) endorse and refer the application to the Higher Doctorate Committee (the Committee)
- b) determine that the application is unsuccessful and advise the applicant of the outcome.

Stage 2 - Higher Doctorate Committee review

5.9. Following receipt of the application and endorsement from the dean, the PVC for graduate research will convene the Committee to consider the application.

5.10. The Committee must comprise:

- a) the President of the Academic Board (or nominee) who shall be Chair
- b) the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research (or nominee)
- c) the PVC for graduate research (or nominee), and
- d) one professor of the University, appointed by the President of the Academic Board. The professor may possess relevant disciplinary expertise, and is subject to appropriate conflict of interest controls.

Admission

- 5.11. An applicant may be approved for admission to the degree if the Committee determines that:
- a) the applicant satisfies the requirements for admission to candidature, and
 - b) the body of work submitted for the award is prima facie worthy of examination.
- 5.12. The PVC for graduate research (or nominee) is responsible for advising both the applicant and the dean of the outcome of the application.
- 5.13. If the application is successful, the University will make a formal offer of admission.
- 5.14. If the application is unsuccessful, the applicant may not reapply for a higher doctorate at the University for a period of five years from the date of the decision.

Submission

- 5.15. The due date for submission for examination is usually four weeks from the date of admission.
- 5.16. The candidate must lodge examinable material as a single submission that includes:
- a) a title page with:
 - i. the full name and degrees of the candidate
 - ii. the date submitted for examination
 - iii. the award to which the submission relates
 - b) a contextual statement summarising the candidate's work, the sources from which it was derived and addressing the work's significance
 - c) the body of work on which the examination will be based
 - d) a declaration by the candidate that the submission comprises only their original work except where indicated in the contextual statement, and
 - e) a description of whether any editorial assistance or generative AI tools were used in preparing the submission, and the extent of its use.
- 5.17. The candidate must not submit any work which has previously been submitted for a qualification in any university or other tertiary education institution.
- 5.18. Where co-authored published material is included in the submission, the contextual statement:
- a) must identify all major co-authors
 - b) must describe the candidate's contribution sufficiently to demonstrate its extent and significance, and
 - c) should include written confirmation from the coordinating author affirming their agreement with the candidate's description of their contribution.
- 5.19. The body of work must be in English unless prior approval to submit in another language has been granted by the PVC for graduate research.

Examination

Appointment of examiners

- 5.20. The PVC for graduate research will appoint two examiners in consultation with the relevant dean.
- 5.21. Examiners must:
- a) be external and independent of the University

- b) hold a doctoral degree (research) or an equivalent qualification
- c) be active in research and recognised as eminent in the relevant field of research, and
- d) have no actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest with the candidate, the other examiner or the University as defined by the Managing Conflicts of Interest Policy ([MPF1366](#)), including:

- i. employment at the University within the last five years
- ii. employment by an approved outside institution
- iii. a close personal or professional relationship with the candidate within the last five years, such as co-authorship or grants.

5.22. At least one examiner must be from outside Australia.

Examination of the work

5.23. The Academic Registrar will administer the examination of the higher doctorate, subject to the direction of the PVC for graduate research.

5.24. Each examiner will independently:

- a) assess whether the body of work meets the criteria set out at Schedule 1: Higher Doctorate Examination Criteria, and
- b) prepare a written report for the Committee that recommends an examination outcome:
 - i. Pass: the candidate's body of work has met the examination criteria, or
 - ii. Fail: the candidate's body of work has not met the examination criteria.

5.25. The PVC for graduate research may replace an examiner and/or annul their report where:

- a) the examiner fails to return a completed examination report by the due date, or
- b) an unmanageable conflict of interest is identified during or after the examination.

Appointment of an adjudicator

5.26. Where one examiner recommends a fail outcome, the PVC for graduate research may appoint an adjudicator. The adjudicator must meet all criteria for an examiner, as described in clause .

5.27. The adjudicator will be provided with a copy of the submission and all examiners' reports, with the examiners' names removed where possible.

5.28. The adjudicator will:

- a) assess the causes and nature of the disagreement between the examiners' reports
- b) evaluate the justifications provided in the examiners' reports
- c) examine relevant sections of the submission, and
- d) provide the PVC for graduate research with a recommended outcome.

5.29. The PVC for graduate research will determine the examination outcome after considering the examiners' reports and the adjudicator's report.

Award of the degree

5.30. The Committee will review the examiners' recommendations and is responsible for confirming that the applicant has met the completion requirements for conferral of the degree by Council in accordance with the Graduation Policy ([MPF1055](#)).

5.31. To be conferred with their degree, the candidate must:

- a) deposit the contextual statement and list of scholarly outputs to the University repository in digital format, and
- b) provide a citation in accordance with the [Graduate Research Citation Process].

5.32. A candidate who does not qualify for the award of the degree may make a new application for admission after a period of no less than five years.

Fees

5.33. Application and examination fees may be charged in accordance with the Student Loans, Fees and Charges Policy (MPF1325).

6. Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibility	Conditions and limitations
Academic Board	Approve the standards and requirements for higher doctorate awards	n/a
President of the Academic Board	Chair the Higher Doctorate Committee and nominate a suitably qualified professor	n/a
Academic Registrar	Administer the examination of the higher doctorate, subject to the direction of the PVC for graduate research	n/a
Higher Doctorate Committee	– Approve admission to all higher doctorate courses at the University – Approve completion and recommend conferral of the award – Disclose any actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest in accordance with the Managing Conflicts of Interest Policy (MPF1366).	n/a
Pro Vice-Chancellor for graduate research	– Convene the Higher Doctorate Committee – Oversee examiner appointments – Appoint the adjudicator	n/a
Dean	Endorse higher doctorate applications based on merit and eligibility	May delegate responsibilities under this policy to the Associate Dean Graduate Research (or equivalent).

7. Schedules

7.1. The following documents are established in accordance with this policy:

- a) Schedule 1: Higher doctorate examination criteria

8. Processes

8.1. The following documents are established in accordance with this policy:

- a) Higher Doctorate Process

9. Definitions

coordinating author has the meaning given to it in the Authorship Policy ([MPF1181](#)).

creative output means performance, musical composition, exhibition, writing (poetry, fiction, script or other written literary forms), design, film, video, e-portfolio or website, multimedia or other new media technologies and modes of presentation.

higher doctorate degree is the highest qualification available by examination at the University and may be awarded for work of international eminence that makes an original, substantial and distinguished contribution in a field of research. The higher doctorate is a level 10 doctoral degree qualification, in accordance with the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF).

scholarly outputs are original research and creative outputs that are peer reviewed and published or disseminated through recognised academic or disciplinary channels. These outputs contribute to the advancement of knowledge in their respective fields and are eligible for consideration under national research assessment and funding frameworks.

sponsor means an academic staff member who nominates a higher doctorate applicant and affirms the merit of their scholarly work.

POLICY APPROVER

Academic Board

POLICY STEWARD

Academic Secretary

REVIEW

This policy is due to be reviewed by 1 January 2029.

VERSION HISTORY

Version	Approved By	Approval Date	Effective Date	Sections Modified
1	Academic Board		1 January 2026	New policy

Schedule 1: Higher doctorate examination criteria

(1) To be awarded a higher doctorate degree, the work submitted for examination must demonstrate that:

- (a) the candidate has made an original, substantial and distinguished contribution to knowledge or creative achievement that is of the highest order of scholarship in the field concerned
- (b) the candidate has established an international reputation for exceptional research and scholarship that has been sustained over a long period of time
- (c) the candidate's work has sparked significant debate or changed research direction or practice in the relevant field, and
- (d) the candidate's work has been carried out with integrity and in accordance with appropriate ethical guidelines.

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