HDR Examinations and Academic Integrity

2026 ACGR Graduate Research Leadership Program

ACGR
AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF GRADUATE RESEARCH

Introduction

- Aims of the session
- Briefly review ACGR's Good Practice Principles related to HDR examination as preparation for case study
- The case study: A complicated PhD Examination (case study 11)
- Feedback on discussions from each group
- Common examination mishaps and missteps
- Conclusions: understanding and mitigating the risks of HDR examination

ACGR Good Practice Principles – Graduate Research Examination

Key Principle

- Thesis* examination is conducted by at least two experts of international standing in the discipline who are external to the enrolling institution, independent of the conduct of the research, and without any real or perceived conflict of interest in reaching their decision.

**The Thesis is defined as a substantial and intellectually coherent product or product(s) using one or more media such as a thesis, dissertation and artefacts, or exegesis and portfolio of creative works and/or performance.*

Sub-principles 1-3

1. The thesis adheres to the principles of research integrity as stipulated in the Australian Code for Responsible Conduct of Research including authorship, plagiarism and research ethics. Theses include a statement of originality incorporating an acknowledgement of others' contributors, editorial assistance, and copyright provisions and approvals.
2. The University has clear and transparent procedures for the nomination and appointment of examiners, the identification of inappropriate examiners, a timely examination process, the evaluation of examiners' reports, and mechanisms for appeal.
3. The University ensures that examiners hold a degree equivalent to, or possess equivalent professional experience, the degree they are examining.



ACGR Good Practice Principles

ACGR Good Practice Principles – Graduate Research Examination (continued)

4 Where appropriate, confidentiality of the examination process should be maintained and the candidate and supervisor must not communicate with examiners during the examination process except where a viva is involved.

5 Examiners provide written recommendations to the University on whether or not the thesis meets the award criteria.

6 The University's processes for determining the outcome of the examination process are available to candidates, supervisors, examiners, and others, and include the opportunity for written communication between the candidate and the committee(s) involved in determining the examination outcome.

7 Normally, open access to the final thesis is provided by the University. There may be reasons including public interest, copyright, commercial-in-confidence, intellectual property or ethical sensitivities that require an embargo for a designated period of time.



[ACGR Good Practice Principles]

Case Study – A complicated PhD Examination

- The case study prompts some discussion points for your group
- As each institution's policies and procedures vary, you may find points where practices diverge
- If you get through the discussion points, you might like to consider what 'good practice' elements you have identified from your colleagues' institutions
- Are there steps that might reduce the likelihood of some of these difficult issues?

Common Examination Mishaps & Missteps

- Candidate wanting to submit thesis for examination without approval of school/supervisor
- Incomplete preliminary pages
- Under-qualified or inappropriate examiners
- Late, insufficient or unprofessional examiners' reports
- Examiners find plagiarism or suspect other kinds of research misconduct
- Divergent examiners' reports
- Students not meeting deadline for corrections or refusing to make all suggested corrections
- Conflict of interest between examiners, supervisors, candidate identified too late
- Misconduct in viva voce/candidate appeals

Questions for Discussion

- What are the most common risks to the smooth running of HDR examinations?
- If you have recently introduced oral examinations at your institution, how has that changed the process? What have been the challenges in introducing oral examinations?
- Where are the most likely points of 'failure' and how do you mitigate them?