



# Guideline: Higher degree by research - examiners' reports recommendations

## Purpose

To provide a guide for staff in recommending the outcome of a thesis examination process.

## Guideline

1. Where all examiner's reports are consistent in their recommendations the Delegated Authority will provide a recommendation to the Associate Dean consistent with those reports.
2. Where examiner's reports differ in their recommendations it is necessary for the Delegated Authority, with additional academic input and support where appropriate, to consider the basis for the different recommendations, and provide a recommendation to the Associate Dean.
3. In cases where the examiner's reports differ the least favourable recommendation is the starting point. For example, where recommendations differ between a candidate being granted the award, granted the award with minor corrections or revisions, and revise and resubmit, the first consideration is the arguments and basis for the 'revise and resubmit' recommendation.
4. There are two types of variations:
  - a. Minor variations in reports occur where the examiners differ between recommending that the candidate be granted the award and recommending the candidate be granted the award subject to minor corrections.
  - b. Divergent reports occur where there are differences between the reports that are not minor variations.

## Minor variation

5. Where minor variation exists in reports, these can generally be considered by the Delegated Authority in providing a recommendation and explanation to the Associate Dean.

## Divergence

6. Every effort must be made to ensure the consideration of three rather than two examiners in the examination process in cases where there is not a clear recommendation from the examiners.
7. In some instances, reports where the comments included are generally consistent may vary between indicating that the candidate be granted the award subject to corrections or revisions, and a revised thesis be submitted for re-examination. In this instance, it is possible that the Delegated Authority can present a recommendation to the Associate Dean that is generally consistent with the reports without undertaking the steps outlined in clause 10.
8. Where the previous clause does not apply, a more rigorous review is undertaken of the substance and basis for the different recommendations in the examiners' reports.
9. In no circumstances is one report dismissed and a decision made only on the other reports that have been received.
10. Potential actions to resolve divergence include but are not limited to:
  - a. Where two examiner's reports were received, an additional examiner may be appointed to provide breadth of expertise in coming to a resolution. The appointment of an additional examiner is by the Associate Dean on the recommendation of the Delegated Authority;
  - b. 'a' does not restrict the appointment of an additional examiner in circumstances where three or more examiner's reports have been received;
  - c. The constitution of a Committee comprising the Delegated Authority and two additional staff of the University with relevant expertise, not including the primary supervisor, to consider the reports in conjunction with the thesis;
  - d. Discussion with the Head of Department or school where they may be able to provide further expertise, disciplinary or otherwise;
  - e. Requiring an oral examination be undertaken as detailed in the *Higher Degree by Research Submission and Examination Procedure*.
11. Where there is a recommendation of fail in divergent reports clause 10(c) is mandatory, in addition to other actions that may be taken.
12. Where a committee is constituted, there are a number of points of reference that the Committee can take into consideration in recommending an outcome. No single point of reference should be relied upon, as it is the interaction of these elements that assist in providing a recommendation. These points of reference can include but are not limited to:

- a. The quality of the examiner's reports that have been received. Is there clear evidence of a thorough reading of the thesis, with factually correct statements and the basis for identified weaknesses explained?
- b. How many examiner's reports have been received? If there is an outlying report, is it the result of disciplinary expertise exclusive to that examiner, or what alternatively is a reasonable explanation for the discrepancy? If an interdisciplinary thesis, is some of the information in the examiner's report outside of or tangential to the examiner's discipline?
- c. A written statement from the primary supervisor or supervisory panel on the examiner's reports. Whilst the primary supervisor or panel cannot make a recommendation as to the outcome, they can comment on the quality and content of the examiner's reports and provide further disciplinary expertise that can be used to inform the decision.
- d. Further clarification from the examiners as to the intent or meaning of particular points of their report and the emphasis to be placed on these aspects.

### **Recommendation to the Associate Dean**

13. The recommendation provided to the Associate Dean by the Delegated Authority includes a written explanation of how the recommendation has been reached, be it through a Committee process or otherwise. This assists in the timely consideration of the recommendation and in cases where a candidate may appeal the decision.

14. In any instance where the Delegated Authority recommends a fail and not all examiners' reports recommend a fail the candidate must be offered a further examination opportunity in accordance with the Research Awards Rule.

15. The Associate Dean has ultimate responsibility for approving the award of the degree. As the approval authority, the Associate Dean may determine a different outcome to that of the recommendation of the Delegated Authority, or ask the Delegated Authority to undertake further work in arriving at a recommendation. This may occur in circumstances where appropriate weight has not been given to one or more examiner's reports, or appropriate work has not been undertaken to explain or resolve divergence between reports.

16. Where there has been divergence between the reports, on approving an outcome the Associate Dean provides a record of the outcome and the documentation used to arrive at the outcome to be recorded in the eForm.

17. Where the Associate Dean approves a fail outcome, they notify the Dean HDR of the decision and associated documentation used to arrive at the decision.

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