PL_AC_016 Research Higher Degree Courses Policy

1. Context
Torrens University Australia values its role as a research and teaching university providing training for the next generation of researchers in Australia and the world.

2. Definitions
Examiner: a person appointed to examine a higher degree by research thesis (HDR).

Supervisor: a person who is formally appointed to provide supervision and advice to a research student.

- Principal Supervisor: the supervisor who provides primary academic leadership in the supervision and manages the research project of the student. This supervisor must:
  - hold a doctoral degree, or has equivalent research experience
  - must be active in research and publishing in, or otherwise making original contributions to, a relevant field of discipline, and
  - a member of Torrens University Australia staff or has a relevant adjunct appointment, or is otherwise formally contracted and accountable to the University for supervisory duties

- Co-Supervisor: a supervisor who will have specific expertise that is useful to the student’s research project and will be available as an independent person from whom the student may seek advice during the course of the research.

- External Supervisor: a supervisor who is not a member of Torrens University Australia staff and may hold formal adjunct, emeritus or honorary research fellow status at the University.

3. Scope
This policy applies to:
- all students enrolled in a Torrens University Australia research higher degree (HDR); and
- all supervisors of Torrens University Australia research higher degree students.

4. Research Courses
The University offers a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree and a Master of Philosophy (MPhil) degree in areas of research strength. Both degrees are assessed by completion of a thesis (or equivalent).

The candidature period for a PhD will be a minimum of two years and a maximum of four years (maximum of six years for part-time candidates) unless with approved extension by the Research Committee. Candidates will develop the capacity to conduct research independently at a high level of originality and quality and, will make an original contribution to knowledge in their chosen discipline.
The candidature period for an MPhil will be a minimum of one year and maximum of two years (maximum of four years for part-time candidates) unless with approved extension by the Research Committee. Candidates will develop a thorough understanding of relevant research techniques and methodologies, and the capacity to demonstrate original and critical thought.

5. Admission and transfer from other institutions
The admission requirements for the PhD and MPhil are set out in the Academic Course Rules. Research students may commence their enrolment at the beginning of any study period, subject to University approval. Conditions relating to admission following commencement of a research degree at another institution are also set out in the Academic Course Rules.

6. Scholarships and awards
The University may allocate a small number of part or full tuition fee-waiver scholarships, and Research Training Program (RTP) Scholarships to exceptional candidates for higher degrees by research (HDR) in accordance with the following conditions:

- for RTP scholarships, any prescribed eligibility requirements set by the Australian Commonwealth and outlined in the Commonwealth Scholarship Guidelines (Research) 2017 (RTP Scholarships Policy).
- scholarships and awards will be granted on merit (including prior academic and research experience)
- any terms and conditions (such as duration of the scholarship, progress requirements and the need to maintain full-time or on-campus enrolment) will be set out in the scholarship/award offer letter
- applicants for higher degrees by research will automatically be considered for scholarships and awards, and
- there is no guarantee that any scholarships or awards will be allocated in any given year.

7. Appointment of supervisors
All research students must have at least one primary supervisor, designated the Principal Supervisor, and a secondary supervisor who will be designated the Co-Supervisor. If deemed necessary, an external supervisor may also be appointed.

7.1 Principal Supervisor
The Principal Supervisor will be a staff member or affiliate of Torrens University Australia with a satisfactory record of research student supervision.

If the Principal Supervisor is unavailable for two or more consecutive months, an Interim Principal Supervisor must be appointed, in consultation with the student.

The Research Committee, on advice from the Chair (or delegate) and relevant discipline experts, is responsible for appointing Principal Supervisors and ensuring they:

- have theoretical and methodological expertise relevant to the student’s research project
- are classified at Academic Staff Level B or above, or hold equivalent status
- are qualified, or have a combination of academic qualifications and professional experience, to at least the same level as the research degree they are supervising
- have continuing active participation in original research, and
- expect to be able to continue to supervise the student through to the completion of the research degree.
7.2 Co-Supervisor
The Co-Supervisor need not be an employee of the University but must have research expertise relevant to the student’s research.

8. Responsibilities of supervisors
Principal Supervisors and Co-Supervisors must:

- abide by all relevant legislation and University policies, in particular the Research Code of Conduct and the Staff Code of Conduct; and
- perform their role as supervisors in accordance with this policy.

External supervisors must also agree to take direction in regard to the supervisory role from the University’s Research Director (or delegate).

9. Role of Principal Supervisors
In the first six months of the student’s candidature, the Principal Supervisor must:

- agree to a schedule of regular meetings with the student
- ensure the research project is appropriate, can be completed within the available time-frame, can be adequately resourced, and complies with all relevant legislation, policies and procedures, in particular the Research Code of Conduct
- provide guidance on commonly encountered tasks and processes, and relevant academic standards
- identify areas where the student requires additional skills or experience and provide advice on how to obtain additional training in these areas
- assist the student to formulate a framework for the research and time estimates for its completion, including milestone performance indicators, and
- ensure satisfactory arrangements are made and documented for the ethical conduct of the research, intellectual property, and authorship of any publications arising from the student’s work.

Throughout the student’s candidature, the Principal Supervisor must:

- meet with the student as per the agreed schedule to exchange ideas and monitor progress
- mentor the student on research matters
- provide pastoral support
- advise on the student’s participation in appropriate courses, seminars and workshops, and on requisite research methods and techniques, as necessary
- assess the student’s progress against milestone performance indicators
- assess the student’s written work periodically, and implement remedial measures if required
- ensure the student submits progress reports according to the requirements set out in the Research Student Progress Procedure
- advise the student on the format and preparation of the thesis
- within reason, read any written work in advance of meetings, and provide regular constructive feedback on the student’s work
- facilitate the student’s engagement with the academic life and research community of the University
- encourage the student to publish their work
- make recommendations on leave of absence, changes to enrolment mode, conversion from MPhil to PhD, extension of candidature and other matters related to the student’s candidature
• advise the Research Director (or delegate) of the names and credentials of possible examiners, and
• confirm the thesis is ready for submission.

10. **Role of Co-Supervisor(s)**
The role of a Co-Supervisor may include any of the roles of a Principal Supervisor, outlined at 9 above, as specifically allocated by the Principal Supervisor or Research Director (or delegate). A Co-Supervisor may also provide advice on specialised academic aspects of the student’s research project.

11. **Course duration**
Rules relating to course duration for the PhD and MPhil are set out in the Academic Course Rules.

12. **Leave of Absence**
Rules relating to leave of absence, recreation leave and personal leave for PhD and MPhil students are set out in the Academic Course Rules. The Research Committee may, on the recommendation of the Principal Supervisor, grant students additional periods of leave as follows:
• sick leave of up to 6 months in the case of serious, chronic conditions (doctor’s certificate required)
• maternity leave of up to 3 months immediately before or after the birth of a baby (doctor’s certificate required), and
• parental leave of up to 12 months for a student who takes on the role of primary caregiver for a child within two years of the child’s birth or adoption.

13. **Transfer from the MPhil to the PhD**
Rules relating to transfer from the MPhil to the PhD and vice-versa are set out in the Academic Course Rules.

14. **Change to field of study**
An HDR student must advise the University in writing of their intention to change their field of study. The student will require approval from the Research Committee.

15. **Enrolment mode**
PhD and MPhil students may enrol in online or campus mode, and may be full-time (approximately 40 hours per week study commitment) or part-time (approximately 20 hours per week study commitment). Students who wish to change their enrolment modes or between full-time and part-time status during their candidature require permission from the Research Committee on the recommendation of their Principal Supervisor.

16. **Progress requirements**
PhD and MPhil students are subject to the progress requirements set out in the Research Student Progress Procedure.

17. **Extension of candidature**
PhD and MPhil students may apply for an extension of candidature of up to 6 months if it becomes clear in the final 12 months of their candidature that they will not be able to submit their thesis within the prescribed course duration. Only one extension of candidature will be permitted, subject to approval by the Research Committee on the recommendation of the Principal Supervisor.
PhD and MPhil students whose theses are not accepted following examination, but who are invited to revise and resubmit, will be granted an extension of candidature of up to 6 months for this purpose, subject to not having already been granted an extension before submission.

Students will be required to enrol during the extension of candidature and may incur additional fees.

18. Suspension and termination
The Vice-Chancellor may suspend or terminate the candidature of PhD and MPhil students in accordance with the conditions set out in the Academic Course Rules.

19. Withdrawal
PhD and MPhil students may withdraw from their candidature at any time and should discuss enrolment and fee implications with the Campus Life Team at the earliest opportunity. Students who wish to return to their studies at a later date must reapply as new students. If they are readmitted and resume substantially the same research project, the course duration may be adjusted in consideration of the time already spent on the project.

20. Assessment
Requirements for the PhD and MPhil thesis are set out in the Academic Course Rules. Every PhD and MPhil thesis will be assessed by two examiners from different institutions in Australia or overseas. Each examiner must:

- have research and/or professional expertise appropriate to the student’s research topic
- be qualified to at least the same level as the thesis being examined, or have an equivalent record of research ability and performance plus previous experience as an examiner of theses at the same level
- be active in original research and/or scholarship, and
- hold or have recently held an academic appointment and be familiar with the standards of the degree.

Together the examiners must cover the full disciplinary range of the thesis. In the case of the MPhil, one of the examiners may be from Torrens University Australia; in the case of the PhD, both examiners must be external.

Students must be advised of the proposed examiners’ names and given the opportunity to declare a potential conflict of interest or other reason why the appointment of an examiner may be inappropriate.

21. Role of examiners
Examiners are responsible for:

- ensuring the thesis is of an appropriate academic quality
- benchmarking the work against standards that apply in other equivalent institutions
- assuring the University that the work complies with the appropriate research protocols in the field of study
- to the best of their ability, certifying that the work in the thesis is original, and
- providing an expert written report that indicates the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis, and makes suggestions for necessary corrections or changes, further research and publication.

The Research Committee will make a determination on the thesis result as prescribed in the Academic Course Rules, taking into consideration the examiners’ reports.
22. **Facilities and resources**
All full-time, campus-based research students will have access to desk space in an open-plan shared office, and reasonable access to computing facilities, software and other resources required for the conduct of their research.

23. **Ethics and responsible conduct of research**
PhD and MPhil students are subject to the University’s policies and procedures on ethics and the responsible conduct of research, including the [Research Code of Conduct](#). Students should seek advice from their Principal Supervisors or the University Research Office if they are in any doubt about their obligations in this area.

24. **Resolving problems between students and supervisors**
Any problem between a student and a supervisor should be resolved in accordance with the [Student Complaints Policy](#). If, in the view of the Vice-Chancellor, the supervisory arrangements become unsatisfactory at any time, new or additional supervisor(s) may be assigned in consultation with the student.

25. **References**
Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015 – Part A, Standard 4