RESEARCH HIGHER DEGREE STUDENT POLICY

Policy Link	Nil
Responsible Officer	Director of Research
Contact Officer	Registrar
Superseded Documents	Research Higher Degree Student Policy version 1.3
Associated Documents	Australian Code for Responsible Conduct of Research Research Higher Degree Examination Procedure Research Higher Degree Progress Procedure Research Higher Degree Supervision Procedure Research Active Policy
Review Date	March 2027

Version	Endorsed by	Approved by	Approval Date	Effective Date
1.4	Research Committee	Academic Board	25 August 2023	25 August 2023

1 PURPOSE

This policy specifies criteria for the admission, appointment of supervisors, progression monitoring and thesis examination of Research Higher Degree (RHD) candidates (including the PhD and MTh), as well as the roles and responsibilities of supervisors.

2 BACKGROUND

Through its academic and related programs, the College exists to prepare men and women for Christian ministry in its many diverse forms. RHD programs are designed to provide graduates the opportunity to undertake a substantial research project in various fields of theology and related disciplines as well as preparation for those intending to pursue further research or, specifically in the case of the PhD, academic positions in institutions of higher education.

Moore Theological College (MTC) offers a research masters (MTh) program and a PhD program. In 2015, MTC was approved for self-accrediting authority for its own PhD program and the first students enrolled in 2016. Prior to that, the PhD was offered as a joint program with Sydney University and Western Sydney University. MTC may consider professional doctorates in the future.

3 SCOPE

This policy and the associated procedures are applicable to all research degree programs at MTC, including candidates and their supervisors.

4 DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition
Annual Progress Review	The system by which the progress of a candidate is formally monitored until thesis submission.
Candidate	A student currently enrolled in a RHD program.
Candidate Panel	A group of Faculty appointed to monitor and advise RC on the progress of a candidate.
Associate Supervisor	A member of the MTC Faculty or other approved person who assists the primary supervisor or secondary supervisors in provision of advice to a RHD candidate on their research.
FTE	Full time equivalence
Full time study	35 hours per week
HoD	Head of an academic department at MTC.
Secondary Supervisor	A secondary supervisor may take on the role of primary supervisor during periods of absence.
MTC	Moore Theological College
Part time study	18 hours per week
Primary Supervisor	A member of the MTC Faculty or other approved person who has primary responsibility for advising a RHD candidate on their research.
RC	The MTC Research Committee
Research Higher Degree (RHD) Program	A postgraduate program for which the main component is an independent research thesis (as defined under levels 9 and 10 of the AQF).

5 POLICY STATEMENT

5.1 The Awards

5.1.1 Master of Theology

The degree of Master of Theology (MTh) may be awarded to a candidate who completes a piece of research that demonstrates a significant contribution in their field of study.

5.1.2 Doctor of Philosophy

The degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) may be awarded to a candidate who completes a piece of research that demonstrates a significant and original contribution to knowledge in their field of study.

5.2 Admission

Admission of students to RHD programs will be based on academic merit, other relevant personal qualities of the candidate, the availability of appropriate supervision, and the necessary facilities and resources required to successfully complete the research program within the minimum period.

Admission of candidates to RHD programs will be determined by the RC on the recommendation of the Director of Research.

5.2.1 Academic criteria

The minimum academic requirement for admission to a RHD program is:

1. a Bachelor of Divinity (BD) with first or upper second-class honours from MTC, **or**
2. a completed masters coursework degree with an independent research component from MTC, **or**
3. academic qualification(s) relevant to the area of intended research deemed equivalent to (1) or (2) by the RC.

In exceptional circumstances, the RC may consider for admission applicants who do not have qualifications equivalent to a four-year honours degree if sufficient evidence is provided of research experience that clearly demonstrates exceptional research skills and the ability to undertake the proposed research program. Such candidates may be required to satisfactorily complete further assessments or complete pre-requisite or co-requisite studies as a condition of admission and continuation.

5.2.2 Language requirements

Applicants whose first language is not English are required to sit an examination administered by the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and achieve a level of 7.5 or better in each category of IELTS academic (or equivalent levels in other tests approved by the RC).

In some fields the applicant must also meet minimum competencies in biblical languages otherwise further language study and assessment of these skills may be specified as a condition of admission and continuation by the RC.

5.2.3 Other criteria

Candidates must also be admitted to the College as well as to the program. This will form part of the written application and subsequent interview that forms part of the admission procedures. As part of the admissions process, a candidate must demonstrate:

(a) understanding of and aptitude for Christian leadership and ministry (including leadership potential, ministry experience and exemplary personal life consistent with the principles of the Anglican Church of Australia, Diocese of Sydney), and
(b) the necessary personal resources to undertake the program.

The Director of Research must certify that there is an appropriate supervisor available for the proposed research program and that the necessary facilities and resources required to successfully complete the research are available.

5.2.4 Verification of credentials

All applicants for admission to the College and for candidacy to RHD programs are required to provide verifiable evidence of pre-requisite qualifications.

5.3 Length of candidature

The minimum length of candidature for the MTh is 2 years FTE and the maximum length is 3 years FTE following admission to the program.

The minimum length of candidature following admission to the PhD program is 3 years for full time candidates and 6 years for part time candidates. The maximum length of candidature is 4 years for full time candidates and 8 years for part time candidates.

Part time study is defined a 50% load.

Candidates who articulate from the MTh to PhD program will have the maximum period of candidature for the PhD program reduced by the period undertaken for the MTh excluding periods dominated by coursework.

Candidates may seek a deferral of candidacy for up to a total of 12 months (two semesters, full time equivalent) from the Director of Research, on the advice of their primary supervisor. Periods of deferral are normally taken as semester blocks. Candidates may not defer during the first 12 months (two semesters, full time equivalent) of enrolment.

5.4 Suspension of candidature

In extenuating circumstances, candidates may apply for a temporary suspension of up to 12 months (full time equivalent) from the Director of Research, with support from the primary supervisor.

The RC may approve suspension of more than 12 months (full time equivalent) on the advice of the Director of Research and primary supervisor.

Periods of suspension will not be included in the calculation of the length of candidature.

5.5 Supervision

5.5.1 Appointment of supervisors

All RHD students must have a supervisory team, approved by the RC, containing at least two supervisors; one of whom will be the primary supervisor and the other(s) may be a secondary supervisor or associate supervisor(s).

The primary supervisor is normally a faculty member of MTC for a duration that will exceed the minimum period of candidature and be approved by the RC to undertake the role.

If a candidate requests a change of primary supervisor or associate supervisor, or if a primary supervisor or associate supervisor declines to continue their supervisory role, the RC shall appoint a requisite replacement on the recommendation of the relevant HoD. Until this is done, another member of the candidate's supervisory team (e.g., secondary supervisor) or the Director of Research will automatically assume responsibility for the candidate. If required, a replacement secondary supervisor shall also be appointed.

An associate supervisor may be external to MTC.

Changes to supervisors must be approved by the RC with the agreement of the candidate.

In rare cases, MTC may remove or suspend a supervisor from their role if the Director of Research considers the supervisor is not able to provide the required level and quality of supervision. The Principal will inform the supervisor and give the supervisor reasons for the decision and the opportunity to respond to those reasons. This applies to all categories of supervisors.

If a breakdown of the supervisory relationship occurs, the candidature panel will convene to mediate an appropriate course of action and advise the Director of Research who will determine what action is to be taken. Independent mediators may also be used.

5.5.2 Eligibility to supervise

Primary Supervisor

A person is eligible to be appointed as a primary supervisor of an RHD candidate provided that all of the following criteria are met:

(a) they are a full-time or fractional full-time faculty member of MTC, or they are a relevant adjunct appointment or are otherwise formally contracted to MTC for supervisory duties;[1]

(b) they are able to fulfil the roles and responsibilities outlined in Section 5.5.4;

(c) their academic tenure exceeds the expected duration of the candidature in the case of a faculty member or adjunct;

(d) they have a high level of expertise in the proposed field of study;

(e) they are determined to be research active;

(f) they have completed a training program in RHD supervision or have a demonstrated track record of successful RHD completions and

(g) they hold a research-based doctorate.

Where the primary supervisor has not had previous experience in successful supervision of RHD candidates to completion a secondary supervisor who is an experienced supervisor (i.e. have successfully supervised two or more RHD students to completion) must be appointed.

Secondary Supervisor

A person is eligible to be appointed as a secondary supervisor of an RHD candidate provided that all of the following criteria are met:

(a) they are able to fulfil the roles and responsibilities outlined in Section 5.5.4;

(b) they have a high level of expertise in the proposed field of study;

(c) they are determined to be research active; and

(d) they hold a research-based doctorate.

Associate Supervisor

A person is eligible to be appointed as an associate supervisor of an RHD candidate provided that all of the following criteria are met:

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[1] *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021*, Section 4.2.3.c.

(a) they are able to fulfil the roles and responsibilities outlined in Section 5.5.4;

(b) they have a high level of expertise in the proposed field of study;

(c) they are determined to be research active; and

(d) in the case of an MTh candidate they hold a research masters degree.

5.5.3 Supervisory load

A primary supervisor may not supervise more than four RHD students at any one time, or take on more than one new PhD or 2 MTh students a year, unless they:

(a) provide evidence of adequate time for supervision taking into account teaching, research and administrative responsibilities, as well as the stage of completion of existing RHD students;

(b) have a track record of successful completions within 4 years for a PhD or 2 years for a Masters; and

(c) have approval by the Director of Research.

5.5.4 Roles and Responsibilities of Supervisors

Supervisors must allocate sufficient time to each RHD student under their supervision, including meetings and review of work. In the event of a supervisor being absent from MTC for a substantial period of time (e.g. study, long service or medical leave) adequate supervisory arrangements must be provided to the satisfaction of the Director of Research and the candidate.

Primary Supervisor

The primary supervisor is responsible for advising and assisting the candidate to complete an original and feasible research program. This role includes:

(a) monitoring the quality of the research being conducted;

(b) advising the candidate on any additional skills training they may require;

(c) supporting the candidate in timely completion of the research;

(d) ensuring that the candidate engages with the College's community of scholars and scholars in the wider community of the respective discipline

(e) exercising pastoral care for the candidate within the overall system provided at MTC;

(f) ensuring that the candidate understands their rights and obligations under relevant MTC policies, especially those relating to the Research Code of Conduct, WH&S and Student Code of Conduct; and the Australian Code for Responsible Conduct of Research.

(g) ensuring regular contact and communication are maintained with the candidate via a mutually agreed, documented mechanism that is reviewed annually by the candidate and supervisor;

(h) providing formal advice on progress of the candidature to the Director of Research as part of the annual review process;

(i) ensuring that the candidate is provided with appropriate resources and support for the research program;

(j) ensuring that absences from the College of more than 4 weeks are covered by adequate supervisory arrangements to the satisfaction of the Director of Research and the candidate if the secondary or associate supervisor is not available or not a faculty member;

(k) providing advice to the Head of Department on the appointment of thesis examiners as soon as possible after the student has put in their notice of intention to submit; and

(l) certifying that the thesis is in the correct format for examination.

Secondary Supervisor

A Secondary Supervisor is appointed as a reserve to the Primary Supervisor. The Secondary Supervisor:

(a) is not involved in the day-to-day supervision of the candidate;

(b) is called on to act in place of the Primary Supervisor during periods of absence (e.g., on leave), which may include providing feedback on the candidate at annual review; and

(c) may assist in the final reading of the thesis before submission.

Associate Supervisor

An Associate Supervisor is appointed only in exceptional circumstances as determined by the Research Committee in consultation with the relevant Head of Department. The Associate Supervisor will assist the Primary Supervisor to fulfil their role, which may include:

(a) supporting the candidate in timely completion of the research;

(b) where appropriate, acting in place of the Primary Supervisor during periods of absence;

(c) stepping into the primary supervisor role if required and approved by RC and agreed by the candidate;

(d) ensuring regular contact and communication are maintained with the candidate; and

(e) providing feedback on the candidate at annual review.

5.5.5 Responsibilities of Candidates

Candidates will:

(a) work diligently on their research so as to complete their thesis within the specified timeframes;

(b) meet with their supervisors according to the agreed schedule or frequency of meetings;

(c) notify their supervisor as soon as practical of any circumstances that may significantly with their research plan and expected dates of submission; and

(d) actively participate in the community life of the College.

5.6 Progression

The progression of candidates will be monitored through the system set out in the associated procedures.

Following admission, candidates will be reviewed at least annually (irrespective of being full or part time). After each review, the Director of Research or review panel may recommend:

(a) continuation of candidacy;

(b) provisional continuation of candidacy pending a further review at a specified date; or

(c) discontinuation of candidacy with a documented basis of the decision.

Candidates may appeal against a recommendation of discontinuation of their candidacy to the Director of Research within 21 days of receiving notification.

In the first 12 months (full time), PhD candidates will undergo a Confirmation of Candidature process to demonstrate (1) the viability of the research topic and methodology; and (2) the original contribution to knowledge. If the research proposal is found to be deficient, the candidate may be provided a further 3 months to develop their proposal.

5.7 External candidates

RHD candidates may complete their studies externally to MTC on a part time basis providing:

(a)   they have spent at least the first year full-time on campus, if they are a PhD candidate;

(b)   they obtain approval of the Director of Research on advice of the supervisor;

(c)   they spend a minimum of 14 days per year on MTC Campus; and

(d)   there is an agreed process for interaction between supervisors and the candidate

5.8 Program transfer

In the case of an MTh, pending satisfactory progress in the research component of the program, after 12 months and before 24 months enrolment (full-time equivalence), a candidate may apply to RC to transfer to the PhD program with agreement of their supervisors. The research component of the elapsed time will be included in the calculation of the period of candidacy for the PhD.

In the case of a PhD, prior to 24 months (full-time equivalence) enrolment, a candidate may apply to RC to transfer to the MTh program.

5.9 Thesis examination

5.9.1 The thesis

The research in the thesis described must have been completed during the period of enrolment for the degree.

The thesis must consist of an account of the candidate's own research. All research performed conjointly with other persons must be fully acknowledged and include a statement of the candidate's contribution to the conjoint research.

The thesis may contain or be composed of published papers or book chapters derived from the research undertaken for the degree.

5.9.2 Submission

Candidates will submit the specified number of copies of their thesis for examination in the correct format or formats, along with the required declarations and certification by their primary supervisor, as prescribed in the procedures.

Prior to examination, a candidate may seek an embargo of up to 2 years on release of the thesis if there are valid reasons (e.g. release may compromise publication of all or part of the thesis).

5.9.3 Oral examination

As part of the examination process a candidate may be required to complete an oral examination in defence of their thesis in a fashion determined by the associated procedures.

5.9.4 Appointment of examiners

MTh theses will be examined by two examiners who will normally be external to MTC. PhD theses will be examined by three examiners who will normally be external to MTC.

In exceptional circumstances (such as the specific subject area of the thesis), a faculty member of MTC not involved in supervision of the candidate may be appointed as an examiner by RC on the advice of the supervisor.

Supervisors, in consultation with their HoD, or Director of Research if they are a HoD, will provide candidates a list of potential examiners (from which two primary and one reserve examiner will be selected) and allow the candidate to formally indicate any reasons why specific examiner(s) should be excluded from the list.

Examiners must have a demonstrated publication track record in the general field of the thesis and normally hold a Doctorate level qualification. Examiners should not have undertaken joint research with the candidate during their period of candidacy or otherwise have a conflict of interest.

5.9.5 Examiners' reports and actions

Examiners' reports are designed to assist the RC in determining whether a candidate has completed the requirements of the program.

Examiners will be requested to submit to the RC a report setting out their detailed review of the thesis (as per the advice to examiners specified in the associated procedures) and to recommend the thesis be:

1. **Awarded**
2. **Awarded pending minor corrections** (to the satisfaction of the Director of Research)
3. **Awarded pending major revisions** (to the satisfaction of the RC)
4. **Not awarded but with possibility of resubmission** following extensive revisions and/or additional research
5. **Not awarded and without the option to resubmit**

A student, for whom the consensus of RC, based on the examiner's reports is to grade the thesis as a "4" may resubmit to the examiners (or new examiners if the former decline to re-examine). A resubmitted thesis may only be graded "1", "2", "3" or "5".

Where there is major disagreement between the referees' reports (e.g. a "1" and a "5"), RC may seek an external review of the reports by the reserve examiner.

Where it is determined by the RC that a thesis **not to be awarded but with possibility of resubmission** on the basis of the scope or originality of the work, a candidate may apply to the RC to have the thesis accepted for an MTh.

6   LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

Australian Code for Responsible Conduct of Research

Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021

Research Active Policy (for Purposes of RHD Supervision)

7   IMPLEMENTATION AND RESPONSIBILITIES

This policy will be implemented by the Director of Research.

8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This policy has drawn on equivalent policies and procedures at the University of Sydney and UNSW.

9 DOCUMENT HISTORY

Version	Approved by	Approval Date	Effective Date	Sections modified
1.0	Governing Board	14 Nov 2013	1 Jan 2014	New Policy
1.1	Governing Board	21 Feb 2019	21 Feb 2019	1. Update title from Director of Postgraduate Studies to Director of Research. 2. Update Section 2. Background. 3. Section 5.2.2 update IELTS level to 7.5 4. Update 5.3 following RACC update to length of candidature 17/08/2018. 5. Add 5.5.4 (d) and renumber section 6. Add reference to *Australian Code for Responsible Conduct of Research* at section 5.5.4. (f) and 6. 7. Add section 5.7. (a)
1.2	Governing Board	11 March 2022	24 March 2022	1. Update Research and Centres Committee and RACC to Research Committee and RC respectively throughout policy. 2. Joint Supervisor title amended to Secondary Supervisor, section added at 5.5.4 detailing role and definition updated. 3. Co-Supervisor title amended to Associate Supervisor. 4. Updated primary supervisor to align with the *HESF* (*Threshold Standards) 2021*, 4.2.3.c at 5.5.1 and 5.5.2.(a) 5. Logo updated
1.3	Governing Board	23 June 2022	23 June 2022	1. Deferral parameters specified at 5.3. 2. Clarified suspension of candidature at 5.4 to distinguish it from deferral. 3. Adjusted parameters for replacement of supervisors at 5.5.1. 4. Update to 5.6 to clarify annual review and confirmation of candidature process. 5. Update 5.9.4 to clarify the number of examiners.
1.4	Academic Board	25 August 2023	25 August 2023	1. Adjust wording describing the role of the Associate Supervisor at 5.5.4