RESEARCH HIGHER DEGREE STUDENT POLICY

Policy Link	Nil
Responsible Officer	Dean of Research
Superseded Documents	Nil
Associated Documents	Procedures for Admission of Research Higher Degree Students Research Higher Degree Examination Procedure Research Higher Degree Progress Procedure Research Higher Degree Supervision Procedure Research Active Policy Research Code of Conduct Policy
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Version	Endorsed by	Date	Authorised by	Approval Date	Effective Date
1.0	The Principal	Oct 25, 2013	Governing Board	Nov 14, 2013	Jan 1, 2014

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 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.

MTC currently offers a research Masters (MTh) program and a joint PhD programs with Sydney University and UWS. The college is applying for accreditation of a PhD program to be offered by MTC alone and 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

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).
Candidate	A student currently enrolled in a RHD program.
Supervisor	A member of the MTC Faculty or other approved person who has primary responsibility for advising a RHD candidate on their research.

Joint Supervisor	A second supervisor to the primary supervisor, who undertakes substantial supervisory duties and may take on the primary supervisor role.
Co-supervisor	A member of the MTC Faculty or other approved person who assists the primary supervisor or joint supervisors in provision of advice to a RHD candidate on their research.
Progression Review	The system by which the progress of a candidate is formally monitored until thesis submission.
Candidate Panel	A group of Faculty appointed to monitor and advise RACC on the progress of a candidate.
HoD	Head of an academic department at MTC.
RACC	The MTC Research and Centres Committee.
Full time study	35 hours per week.
Part time study	18 hours per week.

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 RACC on the recommendation of the Dean 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 RACC.

In exceptional circumstances, RACC 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 7.0 or better in each category of IELTS (or equivalent levels in other tests approved by RACC).

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 RACC.

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 Dean 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 and the maximum length is 3 years full-time equivalence following admission to the program.

The minimum length of candidature for the PhD is 3 years and the maximum length is 5 years full-time equivalence following admission to the program.

Part time study is defined a a 50% load.

Candidates who transfer 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 suspension(s) of candidacy for up to a total of 24 months from the Dean of Research, on the advice of their primary supervisor. Suspensions beyond this limit will be referred to RACC for approval.

5.4 Suspension of candidature

The Dean of Research may approve up to 12 months (full time equivalent) suspension from the program on application by a candidate and support from the primary supervisor. Periods of suspension will normally be in blocks of 3-months and need not be contiguous.
RACC may approve suspension of more than 12 months (full time equivalent) on advice of the Dean 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 RACC, containing at least two supervisors; one of whom will be the primary supervisor and the other(s) may be a joint supervisor or co-supervisor(s).

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

If a candidate requests a change of primary supervisor or a primary supervisor declines to continue their supervisory role, the candidacy will be suspended until a new primary supervisor is appointed. In the case of joint supervisors, a joint supervisor may take over as primary supervisor and another joint supervisor or co-supervisor should be appointed as soon as possible.

A co-supervisor may be external to MTC.

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

In rare cases, MTC may remove or suspend a supervisor from their role if the Dean 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 Dean 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;

  (b) they are able to fulfil the roles and responsibilities outlined in Section 5.4.4;

  (c) their academic tenure exceeds the expected duration of the candidature;

  (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 HDR candidates to completion a joint supervisor who is an experienced supervisor (i.e. have successfully supervised two or more RHD students to completion) must be appointed.

Joint Supervisor

A person is eligible to be appointed as a joint 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 5.4.4;

  (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.

Co-Supervisor

A person is eligible to be appointed as a co-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 5.4.4;

(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 Master's 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 Dean 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 Dean of Research and the candidate.

Primary Supervisor

The primary supervisor is the MTC Faculty member primarily 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) exercising pastoral care for the candidate within the overall system provided at MTC;

(e) 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;

(f) 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;

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

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

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

(j) 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

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

Co-Supervisor or Joint Supervisor

The Co-Supervisor or Joint Supervisor will assist the Primary Supervisor fulfil their role, including:

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

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

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

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

(e) provide feedback to 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 6 months at which time they will present a research proposal to the panel (and an update of progress with the research). If the proposal is found to be deficient, the candidate may be provided a further 3 months to develop their proposal.

Progress reviews will be conducted every 12 months (irrespective of being full or part time) following the acceptance of the research proposal.

After each review, the 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 Dean of Research within 21 days of receiving notification.

5.7 External candidates

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

(a) they obtain approval of the Dean of Research on advice of the supervisor;

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

(c) there is an agree 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 RACC 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 RACC 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

PhD and MTh theses will be examined by two 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 RACC on the advice of the supervisor.

Supervisors, in consultation with their HoD or Dean of Research if an 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 RACC in determining whether a candidate has completed the requirements of the program.

Examiners will be requested to submit to the RACC 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 Dean of Research)

3. **Awarded pending major revisions** (to the satisfaction of RACC)

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 RACC, based on the examiner's reports is to grade the thesis as a "4" may resubmitted 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"), RACC may seek an external review of the reports by the reserve examiner.

Where it is determined by RACC 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 RACC to have the thesis accepted for an MTh.

6 LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

Research Active Policy (for Purposes of RHD Supervision)

Research Code of Conduct Policy

7 IMPLEMENTATION AND RESPONSIBILITIES

This policy will be implemented by the Dean of Research.

8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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

9 REVIEW & HISTORY

This policy will be reviewed in June 2017.

Version	Authorised by	Approval Date	Effective Date	Sections modified
1.0	Governing Board	Nov 14, 2013	Jan 1, 2014	New Policy