

COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIAN DEANS AND DIRECTORS OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Framework for Best Practice in Doctoral Research Education in Australia

October 2007 (Updated July 2008)

Background

In June 1998, the Council of the Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies approved a document entitled *Guidelines: Professional Doctorates*. This document has been widely used in the development of new professional doctorates in Australian universities and has had some influence on their nature and substance. To accord with our policies of continuous improvement and international best practice, the Council decided to revise the document in 2002 in response to the changes in the Australian Higher Education system.

A framework for best practice in Australian doctoral programs was approved by the Council at its April 2004 meeting. It built on guidelines developed by others, particularly the Australian Qualifications Framework¹, and has been improved by consultation with various people with responsibility for or interest and expertise in doctoral education. The Council regards this framework as a 'living document'. Accordingly, it has been revised again in response to a discussion at the May 2007 meeting of the Council. The major drivers of this revision were: (1) the increased internationalization of doctoral education; (2) the burgeoning practice in Australia of awarding the honorific of 'Dr' to graduates of professional programs without a substantive research component. This framework does not apply to such programs, because the Council does not consider such programs to be doctoral programs.

The Bologna process is a major driver for the internationalization of higher education. Its operative goals include introducing a system of clear and comparable degrees, dividing the education system into three levels and promoting the mobility of candidates and staff. The doctoral degrees encompassed by these guidelines conform to the so-called 'third cycle' of the Bologna process.

The Australian government has recognized the pressures to internationalize higher education and increase the global mobility of candidates by several initiatives including:

1. The foreshadowed introduction of the Australian Graduation Statement which is envisaged will be issued to all higher education graduates in addition to the testamur and academic transcript, with the aim of making qualifications more portable and their value more transparent.

¹ <http://www/aqf.edu.au/bmdguide.htm>.

2. Statutory changes which enable Australian universities to waive the fees for candidates: (a) undertaking conjoint research higher degrees with an international university or (b) in receipt of a competitive scholarship.

In response to such changes the Council has introduced a section in the guidelines which addresses good practice in international doctoral education.

This framework encompasses all supervised research doctorates offered by Australian universities². It recognises the diversity of research and research training needs, contexts and outcomes. It is not intended as a substitute for the policies of individual universities, but rather to inform the continuing (re)development of such policies; the Council encourages institutions to use the document when they revise their doctoral programs.

The Council considers that research is the fundamental defining characteristic of a doctorate. That is, a person who has earned a doctorate should be expected to have undertaken a period of research education leading to the successful design, implementation, analysis, theorizing and writing of research that makes a significant and original contribution to knowledge. On this basis, it is necessary for original and significant research to be undertaken in order to earn a best practice doctorate in an Australian university. The Council does not accept that a best practice doctorate can be earned solely or substantially on the basis of coursework. Indeed, the Council believes that coursework within a doctorate should be for research education whether this is directed towards making a significant contribution to knowledge for the discipline or to professional practice.

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² Higher doctorates, which are awarded for internationally-recognised original contribution to knowledge rather than supervised candidature, are not covered by this Framework.

Guideline for Best Practice	Comment
<p>Doctoral Program Outcomes A graduate of a doctoral degree program should have demonstrated the capacity to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • design and implement at a high level of originality and quality, either an original research project(s) of significance to a discipline or cross-disciplinary field, or a research-based project(s) addressing an important problem or question concerning policy and/or practice in a profession or industry; and • present, using one or more appropriate media, a substantial and intellectually coherent product or product(s) such as a thesis, dissertation and artifacts, or exegesis and portfolio of creative works and/or performance, for submission to external examination against international standards. 	<p>Characteristics of the outcomes at this level include a substantial original contribution to knowledge in the form of new knowledge or significant and original adaptation, application and interpretation of existing knowledge. These outcomes, which may have resulted in original publications prior to examination of the thesis, would normally be based on a comprehensive critical review of literature, empirical research, analysis informed by current theoretical developments in the discipline, creative work or other systematic approach embedded in a field or discipline, and/or they may be based on advanced and sustained critical reflection and analysis of professional theory and practice. Each university should formally identify the desired academic, professional and personal attributes of the graduates of its doctoral programs and ensure that each of its doctoral programs provides candidates with the opportunity to develop these attributes.</p>
<p>Entry Requirements A Masters degree or a Bachelors honours degree (first or second class, upper division), or equivalent, <i>and</i> demonstrated capacity to undertake significant research in the proposed doctoral field.</p>	<p>These requirements provide candidates with the necessary background to complete a doctorate in their proposed field of study in a timely manner. Substantial professional experience may be an appropriate additional entry requirement for some doctoral programs. It is appropriate to have a formal transfer process to enable <i>in-progress research</i> Masters candidates, who can demonstrate the viability of their work to fulfill doctoral outcomes, to transfer to a doctoral degree.</p>
<p>Duration of Program At least three years' full time equivalent (FTE) study.</p>	<p>It is unlikely that doctoral outcomes can be met in a program which generally requires less than least three years' full time equivalent (FTE) study. Because candidates hold a range of relevant skills and capacities to undertake doctoral work, the duration of individual candidatures may vary.</p>
<p>Advanced Standing Advanced standing should be negotiable for candidates who have completed appropriate doctoral coursework at another university for equivalent coursework in each doctoral program.</p>	<p>Advanced standing relates only to the coursework in doctoral degrees. Candidates cannot be given advanced standing for the research and scholarship component(s) of doctoral program unless they transfer between doctoral programs or upgrade from a Research Masters program via an agreed process. That is, the examination requirements of the thesis for a doctorate must not be reduced.</p>
<p>Nature of Program A best practice doctoral program should comprise a combination of research with doctoral coursework and professional practice and enquiry as appropriate, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a supervised research and scholarship program of at least three years' FTE study; • a coursework, research and scholarship program of at least three years' FTE study, with at least two years' FTE research and scholarship; or • a professional practice and enquiry, and coursework program, together with at least two years' FTE research and scholarship, totaling at least three years' FTE. 	<p>The Council considers that research is the fundamental substance of a doctorate. It does not accept that a best practice doctorate can be earned solely or substantially on the basis of coursework. The Council considers that the research and scholarship component(s) of a best practice doctoral program should be at least equivalent to two years' FTE doctoral study. The Council considers that doctoral coursework within a doctorate should be for the purpose of research education whether this be for making a significant contribution to knowledge for the discipline or a profession/professional practice.</p>

<p>Research and Scholarship Component The research and scholarship component of a best practice doctoral program should include but not be limited by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • planning and undertaking research, developing a thesis and the preparation of the products for examination; • the development of new research methods and new data analysis; • writing of documents where the document is a research or scholarly product; • the development and/or performance of creative works, and • other activities fundamental to the research and scholarship. 	<p>The Council considers that a best practice doctorate must be based on a period of supervised research education leading to the successful design, implementation, analysis, theorizing and writing of research that makes a significant and original contribution to knowledge. It should therefore be necessary for original and significant research to be undertaken in order to earn a doctorate in an Australian university and coursework in a doctorate must contribute to the research education of the candidate as outlined elsewhere in this document.</p>
<p>Advanced Knowledge Component The advanced knowledge component of a best practice doctoral program should include but not be limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • doctoral-level courses in research methods and data analysis procedures; • other activities at doctoral level, such as those providing advanced knowledge relating to professional practice, appropriate to the outcomes of the degree. • doctoral-level activities designed to contextualize the research project into the wider context of the discipline 	<p>The advanced knowledge component of a best practice doctoral program should challenge and enhance intellectual development beyond that of an honours graduate in the discipline or professional field. Appropriate credit should be given within the program for these activities</p>
<p>Generic Skills Component The generic skills component of a best practice doctoral program should include a generic skills program that aims to complement the above components and is designed to extend the capabilities of a doctoral graduate as a person who is employable, can work well with others and can contribute beyond the area of their immediate research training. It may be tailored to the candidate's individual needs and/or the needs of their cohort group.</p>	<p>The generic skills component should provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • skills and knowledge development required to achieve the timely completion of the degree • skills required for employment in knowledge industries and further career development • development of research ethics and occupational health and safety practices in accordance with the Australian Code of Conduct for the Responsible Conduct of Research: http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/r39syn.htm
<p>Research Environment Candidates should have an open, collegial and productive learning environment including a coordinated program of activity to integrate them into their university and faculty, school and/or department.</p>	<p>Cohort or research group activities are particularly appropriate for integrating candidates into the research environment of their university and faculty, school and/or department.</p>
<p>Supervision A principal supervisor should be appointed to coordinate the research of each candidate. This person should be assisted by a colleague (such as an associate supervisor) or colleagues (such as an advisory team, supervisory panel) who may have different roles in the supervision process.</p>	<p>The principal supervisor should have primary responsibility for the provision and coordination of support and advice for the candidature. This supervisor should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have expertise in the field of study • hold a doctoral qualification or equivalent • be research active in a relevant discipline or disciplines • have sufficient time and resources to provide a quality learning experience for the candidate • have training and/or experience in the supervisory process.

	<p>At least one person involved in the supervision must have supervised a relevant research degree to successful completion as principal supervisor.</p> <p>Prospective candidates should be encouraged to make the inquiries necessary to make an informed decision about the suitability of their proposed supervisors to meet their needs over the period of their candidature.</p> <p>Each institution must have procedures in place to provide timely replacement supervision if the principal supervisor is no longer available.</p>
<p>Resources Each candidate should be provided with the appropriate resources and facilities to enable the successful and timely completion of the degree. Each institution should have a readily-accessible policy on resources for research doctoral candidates.</p>	<p>Prospective candidates must be provided with explicit information about the resources available to enable them to make an informed decision about the capacity of the program to meet their needs.</p>
<p>Monitoring The progress of each candidate should be transparently monitored via a structured process with significant milestones, and regular monitoring/reporting of progress throughout candidature, including prior to submission for examination</p>	<p>Candidates should be regularly advised of their progress and appropriate remedies and appropriate actions should be taken where necessary. Each candidate should be expected to give presentations on their research and scholarship as part of this process.</p>

<p>Codes of Practice Each university should have a code of practice outlining the rights and responsibilities of doctoral candidates, their supervisors and the university.</p>	<p>This code should include criteria for the attribution of authorship which are consistent with the requirements of the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.</p>
<p>Intellectual Property Candidates should be made aware of their university's policy relating to intellectual property before embarking on their program. If the research project involves assignment of intellectual property, the candidate should have access to independent legal advice, which should be paid for by the university through a third party such as the postgraduate candidates' association.</p>	<p>The candidate should be proactively advised of the institution's intellectual property at the time of enrolment. The policy, which must have been approved by the relevant university council, must be accessible throughout candidature. Any confidentiality agreement relating to the research program must not hinder the examination process, nor unreasonably prevent the thesis or other publications resulting from the research from being made public, after a period of time sufficient to protect intellectual property if this is required.</p>
<p>Special Needs of International Research Candidates International research candidates should be regarded as an investment in the development and maintenance of international research partnerships and part of Australia's contribution to education at the doctoral level. Accordingly, each university should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be sensitive to cultural differences and the imperative for timely completion; • be prepared to provide the support, particularly English language support and academic orientation, that might be required to ensure that the international graduates of doctoral programs can function as internationally competitive research professionals.. • ensure that their practice conforms to the National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students under the ESOS Act. 	
<p>Basis for Award of Degree The award of the degree should be based on independent assessment of the quality of the products of the research, which should be examined externally and without bias. Any coursework that is required for the degree must be passed before the products of the research are submitted for examination.</p>	<p>The products of the research should be examined by at least two appropriately qualified independent examiners external to the institution in which the candidate is enrolled.</p> <p>The qualities of examiners should be similar to those of supervisors listed above.</p> <p>Clear guidelines for the assessment of the assessable product(s) of the relevant doctoral program must be provided to both candidates and examiners.</p> <p>The additional use of oral examinations may be appropriate in some circumstances. Where oral examinations are used, candidates should be informed at enrolment and subsequently provided with good preparation for the event.</p> <p>Best practice guidelines for doctoral examination have been developed by the Australian Council of the Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies and are at www.ddogs.edu.au</p>
<p>Data Storage Each university should ensure that the data collected by doctoral candidates during their research are stored as required by the Australian Code of Conduct for the Responsible Conduct of Research http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/r39syn.htm</p>	

<p>Appeal Each university should establish an appeals process to allow candidates to appeal decisions made about their doctoral candidature.</p>	<p>This appeal process should follow the principles of natural justice and should have been formally approved by the university council.</p>
<p>Review Each university should have arrangements to ensure that its doctoral programs are reviewed regularly, and reported to the academic community for comment and deliberation.</p>	