



Cairnmillar  
INSTITUTE

Treatment | Education | Research

# Examination of Theses Policy

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<b>Policy name</b>	Examination of Theses Policy
<b>Policy number</b>	RP008
<b>Date approved</b>	4 October 2023
<b>Approving body</b>	The Academic Board
<b>Responsible officer</b>	Dean
<b>Implementation officer</b>	Associate Dean Research
<b>Next review date</b>	3-5 years
<b>Linked policies</b>	Assessment Policy
<b>Linked forms</b>	

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## 1. Purpose of this policy

- 1.1. In several courses at The Cairnmillar Institute (the Institute), students are required to submit a research dissertation. This policy relates to the examination of these dissertations. The purpose of this policy is to:
- Establish a process to assign each thesis a fair grade or outcome that accurately reflects the quality of the submitted work
  - Obtain feedback from examiners that can be used to improve the quality of future research
  - Prevent unexpected delays in the examination of theses
  - Ensure the qualifications and skills of examiners

## 2. Scope

2.1. This policy applies to all research theses, submitted by students enrolled in:

- a) Master of Psychology (Clinical Psychology)
- b) Doctor of Psychology (Clinical Psychology)
- c) Doctor of Philosophy
- d) Future postgraduate courses in which a minor or major thesis needs to be submitted

## 3. Number of examiners

3.1. For a Master or AQF level 9 thesis there will be a minimum of two examiners. At least one examiner will be an external examiner, the second examiner will normally be an internal examiner.

3.2. For a Doctoral or AQF level 10 thesis there will normally be two examiners. Both examiners will normally be external examiners.

3.3. An additional examiner is appointed whenever:

- a) The difference between the marks the first examiners confer is 10% or more for graded Master theses and, although encouraged to resolve this discrepancy by the Associate Dean Research, the two examiners still do not agree.
- b) One examiner recommends Fail, and the other examiner recommends Pass (with or without revision) or Major Revision and Re-examination, for Doctoral theses.
- c) The examiners provide substantially conflicting remarks—and, although encouraged to resolve these discrepancies by the Associate Dean Research, the two examiners still do not agree.

## 4. Criteria to select external examiners

4.1. Individuals can be appointed as external examiners only if they fulfill several criteria. In particular, these individuals:

- a) Must not have worked at the Institute as either a full time, part time, casual, or adjunct member of staff during the last 12 months
- b) Must not have been a student of the Institute during the last 12 months
- c) Cannot have provided more than approximately 4 hours of assistance to the student's project
- d) Must have expertise on related topics
- e) Must be able to examine the thesis within 4 to 6 weeks
- f) Cannot have developed a relationship with the student outside the work domain
- g) Must not experience a conflict of interest
- h) Must have completed a qualification that exceeds or is equivalent to the qualification that the student is completing

- i) For theses submitted for the Master of Psychology (Clinical Psychology) and Doctor of Psychology (Clinical Psychology), it is desirable but not compulsory, for the examiner to be a psychologist and preferably eligible for membership of the College of Clinical Psychology (if Australian based) or an equivalent overseas standard.

These criteria may be varied in consultation with the Associate Dean of Research and/or the Dean of the Faculty, to take account of the possibility that someone with deep industry or other (e.g. indigenous knowledge) experience could foreseeably be used as a marker, regardless of not meeting other criteria.

4.2. To decide who are the most suitable external examiners, several attributes may be considered, such as the degree to which the examiners are:

- a) Knowledgeable about the topic
- b) Reputable in their field
- c) Experienced in examining similar theses
- d) Available and reliable.

## 5. Criteria to select internal examiners

5.1. Individuals can be appointed as internal examiners only if they fulfill several criteria. In particular, these individuals:

- a) Must be a full time, part time, casual, or adjunct member of staff at the Institute
- b) Must not have been a student of the Institute during the last year
- c) Cannot have provided more than approximately 4 hours of direct assistance to the student's project
- d) Must have expertise on related topics or similar research methods
- e) Must be able to grade the thesis within 4 weeks
- f) Cannot have developed a relationship with the student outside the work domain
- g) Must not experience a conflict of interest
- h) Must have completed a degree that exceeds or is equivalent to the degree that the student is completing
- i) For theses submitted for the Master of Psychology (Clinical), it is desirable but not compulsory for at least one of the examiners to be a psychologist and preferably eligible for the College of Clinical Psychology.

## 6. Conflicts of interest

6.1. Examiners are requested to disclose any conflicts of interest. If a conflict of interest could limit the objectivity of this assessment, another examiner must be sought. While a conflict of interest may not preclude an examiner, any actual or perceived conflicts of interest must be declared to the Associate Dean (Research) for approval prior to that examiner being

nominated. Should the Associate Dean (Research) be the supervisor, declarations of conflicts of interest should be made to the Dean. Conflicts of interest, for example, may include

- a) A commercial or material relationship with the candidate or supervisor.
- b) A familial or romantic relationship with the candidate or supervisor.
- c) A recent (past five years) collaborative or supervisory relationship with the candidate or supervisor.

## 7. Role of examiners

7.1. Examiners are required to:

1. Read the thesis and marking criteria carefully
2. If necessary, seek advice to enhance their understanding on topics in which they are unfamiliar –but without identifying the thesis
3. Make an overall recommendation:
  - i. For a Masters or AQF level 9 thesis, the examiner will recommend a mark out of 100, and a letter grade using the criteria provided, within the agreed timeframe, and submit a report that justifies this grade and provides both positive and negative feedback
  - ii. For a Doctoral or AQF level 10 thesis, the examiner will make a recommendation of **Pass without further amendments or examination (subject to completion of course requirements)**, **Pass with minor amendments to the satisfaction of Associate Dean Research or delegate (subject to completion of course requirements)**, **Major revision with re-examination**, or **Fail**, within the agreed timeframe, and submit a report that justifies this grade and provides both positive and negative feedback.
4. Declare any conflicts of interests before examining the thesis
5. Refrain from discussing this thesis with the supervisor, student, or anyone involved in the research
6. Sign a formal confidentiality agreement — only necessary if the thesis contains material that needs to be protected, such as information that could be translated into a patent.

## 8. Process of Examination

8.1. Administration for thesis examinations will be carried out in accordance with the Thesis Examination Procedure which is implemented and monitored by the Student Services Manager, and approved by the Dean or Associate Dean (Research).

## 9. Calculation of mark and grade

- 9.1. Examiner recommendations are reviewed. If two examiners agree on a recommendation, then this recommendation applies.
- 9.2. To calculate the final grade, in the case where marking criteria require assessors to assign a numeric mark and grade, the marks that are assigned by each examiner are averaged.

### **9.3. Final grading where an additional examiner is used**

- 9.3.1. However, when an additional examiner is sought, this procedure may not be applicable. The need to seek an additional examiner implies that, perhaps, one of the examinations was not suitable and this possibility needs to be accommodated appropriately.
- 9.3.2. To calculate the final grade, the Associate Dean (Research) and Dean, may consider the patterns of grades to determine if two examiners agree and one is discordant. Academic judgement is applied to determine if the third discordant examiner's report can be set aside. In most cases the outlying recommended mark, that which is more than 10% discrepant where numerical marks are assigned or is discordant where a summary recommendation is made, will be disregarded and only the concordant marks will be taken. In the case where two of the examiners assign a failing grade, the final grade will be a fail.
- 9.3.3. The weight attached to each mark may depend on:
- a) The extent to which each examiner is familiar with the marking scheme at the Institute
  - b) The degree to which the examiner has acquired extensive knowledge of research in general
  - c) The extent to which the examiner has acquired extensive knowledge about the relevant topic
  - d) The degree to which the examiner usually provides grades that are similar to those of other examiners.

***End***