

# RESEARCH HIGHER DEGREE CHANGE OF TOPIC AND/OR COURSE POLICY AND PROCEDURE



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## 1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 This policy and procedure outlines how CQUniversity will manage research higher degree (RHD) candidates:
- making a substantive change to an approved research thesis topic, and/or
  - changing from one RHD course to another, including at the same or different level within the [Australian Qualification Framework](#) (AQF)<sup>1</sup>.

## 2 SCOPE

- 2.1 This policy and procedure applies to CQUniversity candidates enrolled in a RHD, including Masters by Research, Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), Doctor of Education, Doctor of Professional Studies and PhD by Portfolio, in either onshore or offshore mode.
- 2.2 This policy and procedure does not apply to candidates wishing to transfer between degree types purely on the basis of physical location, such as from the PhD to the PhD (Offshore) or vice versa. Where the course change is being sought on the basis of relocation alone, candidates should refer to the relevant Course Rules.

<sup>1</sup> For example, transitioning from a masters degree to a doctoral degree, a doctoral degree to a masters degree, or between different types of doctoral degrees such as the Doctor of Philosophy, Doctor of Education and Doctor of Professional Studies.

### 3 POLICY STATEMENT

#### Definition for a change of thesis topic

- 3.1 A thesis 'topic' should not be confused with a thesis 'title'.
- The **Thesis "Title"** refers to an approved phrasing, of up to 25 words in length, which summarises the purpose, context, outcome and/or findings of the body of work undertaken during a RHD. A title may change multiple times during the course of candidature. Requests to change the thesis title can be communicated via a Confirmation of Candidature (CoC) document, the six-monthly progress reports, or a Change to Description of Candidature Form.
  - The **Thesis "Topic"** refers to the overall scope of work being proposed and/or conducted during a research degree; typically, reflecting the selected discipline area; the research aims, objectives and/or questions; and the choice of research methodology and/or methods.
- 3.2 An approved thesis topic is as per the details in application for admission or CoC document (whichever is the most recent within the candidature timeline).
- 3.3 In considering whether the scope of change is enough to warrant a 'change of topic' application, candidates and supervisors should consider whether the proposed change will require one or more of the following:
- a change to the supervisory panel and/or a change to the host School
  - a change in the disciplinary basis of the study (possibly requiring a change of Academic Plan and the associated tuition fee category)
  - a substantive change in the research methodology and/or methods, or
  - substantive change/s in the project's logistical arrangements, including ethics and research risk clearances, budget, timeline, industry collaboration, or other matters.
- 3.4 A change of topic will typically involve more than one of the above items. If there is any doubt as to whether the proposed change represents a 'change of topic', advice should be sought from the Postgraduate Research Coordinator, Deputy Dean Research or Dean School of Graduate Research.
- 3.5 A candidate who pursues a change of topic without prior approval may be issued with a Show Cause notice as to why their candidature should not be cancelled. Scholarship holders may also have their awards cancelled.
- 3.6 Candidates in the PhD by Portfolio are not permitted to make a substantive change in topic after admission, except where this is accompanied by an application to change degree type (for example, if transitioning to the PhD degree).

#### Definition for a change between research higher degree courses

- 3.7 A change between RHD courses occurs where a candidate undertakes a change:
- **between levels** of the AQF, in any direction (e.g. transition from AQF Level 9 to Level 10; or from Level 10 to Level 9), or
  - **within the same level** of the AQF (e.g., moves from one type of doctorate to another, or masters degree to another).
- 3.8 The expectations, requirements and characteristics of research activities undertaken in masters and doctoral degrees are different. Candidates seeking to change from a masters to a doctoral degree should strongly consider completing their masters degree prior to enrolling in a doctorate, rather than transferring part-way through their research.

### 4 PROCEDURE

- 4.1 Where a candidate wishes to apply for consideration of a change of course or topic, their submission must have the support of the candidate's principal supervisor and meet all University requirements.

## Rationale and timing for a topic or course change

4.2 Candidates are encouraged to apply for a course or topic change early in candidature, as making significant change to a research study at an advanced stage of the degree may be difficult. Please refer to the timeframes table in section 4.4 for when a change of course may be applied for.

4.3 A change of topic may only be applied for within the following timeframes:

Course	Appropriate timeframe for requesting change of topic	Process
Masters by Research	0 – 1.5 EFTSL	By application to the School of Graduate Research
PhD, Doctor of Professional Studies or Doctor of Education	0 – 2.5 EFSTL	
PhD by Portfolio	0 - 0.5 EFTSL	

4.4 A change of course may only be applied for within the following timeframes<sup>2</sup>:

Existing course (From)	New course (To)	Minimum timeframe	Maximum timeframe	Guidance notes
Masters by Research (including teach-out courses named by discipline e.g. Master of Applied Science)	Masters by Research	From admission	Submission of the Intention to Submit Form	Assessment will take place via the Dean School of Graduate Research.
Masters by Research	Doctoral Degree	Not before CoC	1.5 EFTSL  *Note: if the upgrade is being sought simultaneously with the CoC, then the maximum deadline for submission will be as per the <a href="#">Confirmation of Candidature Procedure</a> , which is 0.5 EFTSL	Assessment will take place as per the peer-review procedures described in the Confirmation of Candidature Procedure. The CoC and upgrade proposal may be submitted simultaneously but must be separate documents. If the candidate cannot prepare the joint CoC and upgrade documents prior to 0.50 EFTSL, then they must attempt the CoC first (by 0.75 EFTSL) and then separately apply for the upgrade (and not later than 1.5 EFTSL).
Doctoral Degree	Masters by Research	From admission	Submission of the Intention to Submit Form	Assessment will take place via the Dean School of Graduate Research.

<sup>2</sup> Candidates supported by a Commonwealth Research Training Program place should be aware that enacting a change from the doctorate to the masters level course will result in tuition fees being triggered, if the candidate is greater than 2 EFSTL in program consumption at time of transitioning.

PhD	Doctor of Professional Studies or Doctor of Education	Not before CoC	2.0 EFTSL	Assessment will take place via the Dean School of Graduate Research.
Doctor of Professional Studies or Doctor of Education	PhD	Not before CoC	2.5 EFTSL	Assessment will take place via the Dean School of Graduate Research.
PhD by Portfolio	Masters by Research	From admission	0.5 EFTSL	Assessment will take place via the Dean School of Graduate Research.
PhD by Portfolio	Doctoral Degree	From admission	0.5 EFTSL	Assessment will take place via the Dean School of Graduate Research.

### Request to change an approved thesis topic

- 4.5 Candidates wishing to change their approved research topic must lodge an application via the School of Graduate Research.
- 4.6 An application for a change of topic will comprise of the following information, which may be provided by email attachment (no proforma applies):
- the rationale for seeking the change
  - details of the proposed change of topic, including:
    - the revised title
    - a brief project background and research rationale
    - details of the revised methodology and/or methods, and
    - a Turnitin Report generated on the submitted research proposal, if requested by the School of Graduate Research
  - a statement addressing how the proposed change of topic will impact on:
    - the candidature budget and timeline
    - the need to obtain or modify human or animal ethics approvals
    - the need to obtain or modify research risk approvals, and
    - any other matter of relevant to the project feasibility and/or academic requirements (e.g. intellectual property, industry agreements or other items)
  - a statement of endorsement from the principal supervisor, describing:
    - the appropriateness of the proposed topic to the degree being sought, and
    - the ability of the candidate to execute the proposed topic.
- 4.7 The Dean School of Graduate Research is responsible for approving applications for a change of thesis topic, in consultation with the Deputy Dean Research, Postgraduate Research Coordinator and/or the Principal Supervisor, as appropriate.

- 4.8 Where the candidate requesting a change of topic has already undertaken the CoC milestone, an additional round of peer-reviewing may be used to determine the appropriateness of the new topic for the degree being sought. The peer-reviewers may be the same as those used for the CoC milestone, if available. If peer-reviewers are required, their appointment will follow the same procedure and expectations as per the Confirmation of Candidature Procedure.

### **Request to change between research higher degree courses**

- 4.9 Before recommending a change of degree, the candidate's supervisory panel will consider:
- the applicant's potential to conduct research at the degree level being applied for
  - whether the proposed change to the project is likely to produce a thesis of a volume and quality appropriate to the degree being sought, and
  - the ability of the applicant to complete on time, especially for those candidates contemplating a change from masters to doctoral candidature.
- 4.10 In considering adequate demonstration of doctoral-level performance, candidates will supply high-quality research output (i.e., one of more finalised thesis chapters; or peer-reviewed journal articles). Research outputs will be highly regarded where these have been published in reputable, peer-reviewed destinations and/or recognised within the scholarly community, as appropriate to the discipline area. Such outputs must have been generated since the time of commencing enrolment at the University and must be linked with the existing RHD topic area.
- 4.11 Candidates applying for a change **from a masters to doctoral degree** must lodge an application comprising of:
- the completed Change of RHD Form, including a fully populated comparison table distinguishing the key features of the masters program with that of the proposed doctoral research
  - a methodology statement describing the additional and/or adjusted research activities that are proposed
  - a literature review statement that provides sufficient context for the doctoral study. This may include introducing new or expanded theoretical perspectives and/or an overview of the chosen methodologies and methods, over and above the literature review that was tabled for the masters level course. The literature statement may be submitted either as a separate document of, or by the addition of further paragraphs within the existing masters-level literature review
  - a Turnitin Report generated on the submitted doctoral research proposal
  - evidence that the candidate has completed any conditions indicated on the candidate's original description of candidature
  - evidence of progress at a standard and rate expected of doctoral candidates
  - a statement of endorsement from the principal supervisor, and
  - a Gantt chart demonstrating the key milestones and timelines for the proposed course, an itemised project budget (in the template prescribed by the School of Graduate Research) describing all funding sources that will contribute to the project, and an indication of whether these have already been secured. Where projects are supported by an external funding source (e.g., industry partner), a copy of the funding agreement/research contract should be referenced. The above items are separate and in addition to, the CoC documents.
- 4.12 Where the candidate wishes to seek a change of course simultaneously with the CoC process, confirmation documentation must be prepared at a level appropriate to the existing degree, and append the additional information relating to the new course being sought.
- 4.13 Candidates applying for a change from **doctoral to masters program** must complete the Change of RHD Form, which includes the requirement to provide a revised research proposal outlining the research to be conducted, and the impact/s of the proposed change on the timeline and budget.

- 4.14 Where the change of degree request is an increase of AQF Level from 9 to 10, the review and assessment process for change of courses will follow the same procedure as described in the Confirmation of Candidature Procedure, with respect to appointment of a Chair, recruitment of peer-reviewers, and recommendation to the Confirmation of Candidature Reference Group for final approval. The peer-reviewers can be the same reviewers used for the CoC milestone.
- 4.15 Where an application for change of degree has been lodged simultaneously with the CoC documentation, only one round of peer-review and consideration by the Confirmation of Candidature Reference Group is required. In these circumstances, the peer-reviewers will conduct their assessments against the AQF level being sought in the change proposal.
- 4.16 Where the change of degree request relates to movement within AQF levels (e.g. Level 9 to Level 9, or Level 10 to Level 10), or a decrease of AQF level, the change of course can be considered by the Dean School of Graduate Research (additional peer-review is not required).
- 4.17 The Chair may request the candidate, supervisor and/or Peer-Review Panel to:
- attend an oral presentation of the proposal given by the candidate, and/or
  - participate in an interview to confirm that the candidate's performance is consistent with doctoral standard, and/or confirm that revisions to the research proposal have been completed to the satisfaction of the Chair.

Such a presentation or interview may take place physically, or by tele- or video-conferenced means.

### Enrolment implications of course or topic changes

- 4.18 Candidates should seek advice from the School of Graduate Research prior to undertaking a change in course and/or topic, to ensure that they are aware of the enrolment, tuition fee and/or scholarship implications of their proposed change.
- 4.19 Candidates who are approved for a change of course will be advised of their revised maximum completion date by the School of Graduate Research administration.
- 4.20 Candidates who are approved for a change of topic or course, and which results in a change of Academic Plan and/or degree type, may experience a change to their equivalent full-time student load (EFTSL) status. In calculating whether prior load consumption will apply to the new course EFTSL, the principles in the following table will be applied:

Change of topic	Change of academic plan <sup>3</sup>	Change of course	Impact on EFTSL standing
Yes	None required	None required	Candidate continues with same EFTSL standing (i.e., prior load applies)
Yes	Yes	None required	Candidate continues with same EFTSL standing (i.e., prior load applies)
Yes	Yes	Yes	If candidate is not yet confirmed, enrolment will be re-set at zero EFTSL <sup>4</sup>  If the candidate has been confirmed, then EFTSL will be carried through to the new degree.

<sup>3</sup> An Academic Plan is an area of specialisation that forms part of the requirements for an approved course. For RHD Candidates, the Plan is indicated by the unit-level enrolment within the University's student management system, Student One.

<sup>4</sup> For domestic candidates, this means a full load entitlement applies under the Research Training Program.

- 4.21 A change of a course or topic which relates to a change in the recorded Academic Plan, may result in the candidate's enrolment being varied between low-cost, high-cost or high-cost medical categories, used to calculate tuition liability. Different tuition rates may apply to the proposed degree type.
- 4.22 International candidates are responsible for notifying relevant authorities about changes to their enrolment details and to manage any associated student visa implications.
- 4.23 Full-fee tuition may apply to the remainder of their (new) degree for a doctoral candidate who wishes to apply for a change to masters level studies, and who has already exhausted the standard EFTSL available for a masters degree.
- 4.24 Candidates in receipt of a scholarship are not guaranteed continuation of stipend payments if approved for a change of course or topic. A scholarship may be continued only in circumstances where the newly approved topic is consistent with the aims and eligibility criteria of award as originally offered. Any change to EFTSL status may also impact on scholarship eligibility and tenure.

## 5 APPEALS

### Internal appeals

- 5.1 Candidates will be advised of their options for internal appeal at the time they are notified in writing of the decision and reasons for the decision.
- 5.2 Candidates may appeal a decision made under this policy and procedure by submitting an appeal to the Academic Appeals Committee, in accordance with the grounds for appeal, timelines and processes in the [Academic Appeals Policy and Procedure](#).

### External appeals

- 5.3 Candidates will be advised of their options for external appeal at the time they are notified in writing of the decision and reasons for the decision.
- 5.4 Any student not satisfied with the outcome of their internal appeal may appeal the decision by referring the matter to the [Queensland Ombudsman](#) or to a court or tribunal with an appropriate jurisdiction.

## 6 RESPONSIBILITIES

### Compliance, monitoring and review

- 6.1 The Dean School of Graduate Research is responsible for implementing, monitoring, reviewing and ensuring compliance with this policy and procedure.

### Reporting

- 6.2 No additional reporting is required.

### Records management

- 6.3 Employees must manage records in accordance with the [Records Management Policy and Procedure](#). This includes retaining these records in a recognised University recordkeeping information system.
- 6.4 University records must be retained for the minimum periods specified in the University Sector Retention and Disposal Schedule on the [Queensland State Archives website](#). Before disposing of any records, approval must be sought through the Records Management Office (email [records@cqu.edu.au](mailto:records@cqu.edu.au)).

## 7 DEFINITIONS

- 7.1 Terms not defined in this document may be in the University [glossary](#).

## Terms and definitions

**Approved topic:** a title and direction of study that has been approved during the application for admission or confirmation of candidature documentation.

**Chair:** refers to the Postgraduate Research Coordinator (or their nominee).

**EFTSL:** equivalent full-time study load, one EFTSL is equivalent to one year of full-time study.

## 8 RELATED LEGISLATION AND DOCUMENTS

[Academic Appeals Policy and Procedure](#)

[Australian Qualifications Framework \(AQF\)](#)

[Confirmation of Candidature Policy and Procedure](#)

[Doctor of Philosophy by Portfolio Course Rules Policy and Procedure](#)

[Research Higher Degree Course Rules Policy and Procedure](#)

[Research Higher Degree \(Offshore\) Course Rules Policy and Procedure](#)

## 9 FEEDBACK

9.1 Feedback about this document can be emailed to [policy@cqu.edu.au](mailto:policy@cqu.edu.au).

## 10 APPROVAL AND REVIEW DETAILS

Approval and Review	Details
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Notes	This document was formerly known as the Change between Masters and Doctoral Research Higher Degree Programs Procedure (01/07/2016).