RESEARCH HIGHER DEGREES CHANGE OF TOPIC AND/OR COURSE POLICY AND PROCEDURE

CONTENTS

1 PURPOSE

1.1 This policy and procedure provides guidance to candidates, supervisors and research administration staff with respect to:

- making a substantive change to an approved research thesis topic, and/or

- changing from one research higher degree course to another, including at the same or different level within the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF)[1].

2 SCOPE

2.2 This policy and procedure applies to all candidates enrolled in a research higher degree (RHD) at CQUniversity, including Masters by Research, Doctor of Philosophy, Doctor of Education, Doctor of Professional Studies and Doctor of Philosophy by Portfolio, in either onshore or offshore mode.

3 POLICY STATEMENT

Definition for a change of thesis topic

3.1 The definition of a thesis 'topic' should not be confused with that for thesis 'title'.

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[1] 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.

- **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. Titles are often changed multiple times during the course of candidature. This can be adequately communicated via a confirmation of candidature (CoC) document, the six monthly progress reports, or via a Change to Description of Candidature Form.

- **Thesis "Topic"** refers to the overall scope of work being proposed and/or conducted during a research degree; typically in relation to the selected discipline area; the research aims, objectives and 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 will consider whether the proposed change will require one or more of:

- a change to the supervisory panel and/or a change to the host School

- a change in the discipline basis of the study (possibly requiring a change of Academic Plan)

- a substantive change in the research methodology and/or methods, or

- substantive change/s in the logistical arrangements required for the project, including items such as 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 Dean, Graduate Studies.

Definition for a change between research higher degree courses

3.5 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 doctoral or masters degree to another).

4 PROCEDURE

4.2 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 must apply for a course or topic change as early as possible within their research program, as making significant change to a research study at an advanced stage of the degree may be difficult.

4.3 Candidates in the Doctor of Philosophy 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, to transition to the standard Doctor of Philosophy degree).

4.4 The expectations, requirements and characteristics of research 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 the research.

4.5 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 RHD office
Doctor of Philosophy, Doctor of Professional Studies or Doctor of Education	0 – 3.0 EFSTL	By application to the RHD office
PhD by Portfolio	0 - 0.5 EFTSL^{Error! Bookmark not defined.}	By application to the RHD office

4.6 A change of course may only be applied for within the following timeframes:

Existing Course (From)	New Course (To)	Minimum Timeframe	Maximum Timeframe	Guidance notes
Masters by Research	Masters by Research	From admission	Submission of the 'intention to submit' form	Assessment will take place via the Dean, Graduate Studies
Masters by Research	Doctoral Degree[Error! Bookmark not defined.]	Not before CoC	1.5 EFTSL\n\n*Note: if the upgrade is being sought simultaneously with the CoC, then the maximum deadline will be as per the Confirmation of Candidature Policy and Procedure, which is 0.75 EFTSL	Assessment will take place as per the peer-review procedures described in the Confirmation of Candidature Policy and 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 0.75 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[Error! Bookmark not defined.]	Masters by Research	From admission	Submission of the 'intention to submit' form	Assessment will take place via the Dean, Graduate Studies
Doctor of Philosophy	Doctor of Professional Studies or Doctor of Education	From admission	2. EFTSL	Assessment will take place via the Dean, Graduate Studies
Doctor of Professional Studies or Doctor of Education	Doctor of Philosophy	From admission	2.5 EFTSL	Assessment will take place via the Dean, Graduate Studies
PhD by Portfolio	Masters by Research	From admission	0.5 EFTSL	Assessment will take place via the Dean, Graduate Studies
PhD by Portfolio	Doctoral Degree[Error! Bookmark not defined.]	From admission	0.5 EFTSL	Assessment will take place via the Dean, Graduate Studies

Request to change an approved thesis topic

4.7 Candidates wishing to change their approved research topic must lodge an application via the Research Division (RHD Office).

4.8 An application for a change of topic will comprise of the following sections:

- the rationale for seeking the change;
- details of the proposed change of topic, including;
  - o the revised title
  - o a brief project background and research rationale
  - o details of the revised methodology and/or methods, and
  - o a Turnitin Report generated on the submitted research proposal.
- a statement addressing how the proposed change of topic may impact on
  - o the candidature budget;
  - o the candidature timeline.
  - o the need to obtain or modify human or animal ethics approvals;
  - o the need to obtain or modify research risk approvals; and
  - o 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
  - o the appropriateness of the proposed topic to the degree being sought, and
  - o the ability of the candidate to execute the proposed topic.

4.9 The Dean, Graduate Studies is responsible for approving applications for a change of thesis topic, in consultation with the Deputy Dean (Research) and/or the Principal Supervisor, as appropriate.

4.10 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. If required, this will follow the same procedure and expectations as per the Confirmation of Candidature Policy and Procedure.

4.11 A candidate who pursues a change of topic without due 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.

Request to change between research higher degree courses

4.12 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 yield a thesis appropriate to the degree being sought, and
- the ability of the applicant to complete on time.

This is particularly important in regards to a candidate contemplating a change from masters to doctoral candidature.

4.13 In considering adequate demonstration of doctoral-level performance, candidates will be expected to 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, as appropriate to the discipline area.

4.14 Candidates applying for a change from a masters to doctoral degree must lodge an application comprising of:

- the Change of Research Higher Degree Form

- a full doctoral research proposal outlining the substantive change from masters to doctoral research

- a Turnitin Report generated on the submitted doctoral research proposal

- evidence of doctoral level performance in the conduct of their research, such as a substantial piece of writing or other research output

- evidence that the candidate has completed any conditions indicated on the applicant's original description of candidature

- evidence of progress at a standard and rate expected of doctoral candidates, and

- a statement of endorsement from the principal supervisor.

The above items are separate and in addition to, the CoC document.

4.15 Where the candidate wishes to seek a change of course simultaneously with the CoC process, it will be necessary to prepare the Confirmation documentation at a level appropriate to the existing degree, and append the additional information relating to the new course being sought.

4.16 Candidates applying for a change from doctoral to masters program must complete the Change of Research Higher Degree 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.

4.17 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 Panel Chair, recruitment of peer-reviewers, and recommendation to the Confirmation of Candidature Committee for final approval.

4.18 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 Committee is required. In these circumstances, the peer-reviewers will conduct their assessments against the AQF level being sought in the change proposal.

4.19 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, Graduate Studies. (Additional peer-review is not required)

4.20 The Panel Chair may request the candidate, supervisor and/or peer-review panellists to:

- attend an oral presentation of the proposal given by the candidate, and/or

- participate in an interview to demonstrate doctoral level performance, and/or confirm that an adequate response has been made in term of revisions suggested by the peer-review panel.

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

Enrolment implications of course or topic changes

4.21 Candidates should seek advice from the RHD administration 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.

4.22 Candidates who are approved for a change of course will be advised of their revised maximum completion date by the RHD administration.

4.23 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 in 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[2]	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[3] If the candidate has been Confirmed, then EFTSL will be carried through to new degree.

4.24 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 and high-cost medical categories, used to calculate tuition liability. Different tuition rates may apply to the proposed degree type.

4.25 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.

4.26 Candidates in receipt of a scholarship are not guaranteed continuation of stipend payments if approves 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

5.2 CQUniversity shall ensure that all students are 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 Students 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 CQUniversity shall ensure that all students are 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

6.2 The Dean, Graduate Studies is responsible for the implementing, monitoring and reviewing this policy and procedure to ensure it continues to achieve its purpose.

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[2] 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 Student One.
[3] For domestic candidates, this means a full load entitlement applies under the Research Training Program.

Reporting

6.3   No additional reporting is required.

Records management

6.4   Staff must maintain all records relevant to administering this policy and procedure in a recognised University recordkeeping system.

7   DEFINITIONS

7.2   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.

8   RELATED LEGISLATION AND DOCUMENTS

Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)

Research Higher Degree Course Rules Policy and Procedure

Research Higher Degree (Offshore) Course Rules Policy and Procedure

Doctor of Philosophy by Portfolio Course Rules Policy and Procedure

Confirmation of Candidature Policy and Procedure

9   FEEDBACK

9.2   Feedback about this document can be emailed to policy@cqu.edu.au.

10   APPROVAL AND REVIEW DETAILS

Approval and Review	Details
Approval Authority	Research Higher Degrees Committee
Advisory Committee to Approval Authority	N/A
Administrator	Dean, School of Graduate Research
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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).