Summary of Policy Recommendations

Introduction

These recommendations for revision to policy documents, pertaining to all aspects of Higher Degree Research candidature, have come out of the meetings of the Working Party on Higher Degree Research, set up by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education), to oversee the revision of the *Graduate Award Rules*, and to ensure consistency between the legislation and the new delegations and governance arrangements that the University has been implementing since the end of 2005. The Report of the Working Party on Higher Degree Research contains the recommendations for revision to the *Graduate Award Rules*.

The Working Party on Higher Degree Research met five times between early May and late July 2006, during which time a range of issues relating to the stages on the 'life cycle' of an HDR candidate were discussed. While the main task of the Working Party was the revision of the *Graduate Award Rules*, it became clear that many of the issues raised were more appropriately dealt with in policy documents. The issues and recommended actions are summarized in the table at Appendix A of the Report of the Working Party on Higher Degree Research. This current document details the recommendations for policy revision, which would need to occur as a secondary stage after the implementation of revisions to the *Graduate Award Rules*.

Relevant Policy documents

- **PhD Attendance Requirements**
  (*http://www.anu.edu.au/graduate/papers/1599e-03.php*)
- **Guidelines for supervision and candidature of doctoral research students**
  (http://www.anu.edu.au/graduate/current/phd_supervision)
- **Information for Candidates on the submission and examination of theses for the degree of doctor of philosophy**
  (http://www.anu.edu.au/graduate/papers/160a-92.php)
- **Code of Practice for supervision in Higher Degree Research**
  (http://info.anu.edu.au/policies/Codes_Of_Practice/Students/Other/Supervision_in_Higher_Degrees _by_Research.asp)
- **Supervision of Masters by research students**
  (http://www.anu.edu.au/graduate/papers/522a-88.php)
- **Postgraduate Research Guide**
  (http://www.anu.edu.au/graduate/pubs/PRG.pdf)
- **Research Degree Oral Examination: Policy and Procedure**
  (http://info.anu.edu.au/policies/Policies/Students/Other/PhD_Oral_Examinations_Holding_of.asp)
- **Various Faculty guidelines on masters theses formats**
  (located at *http://www.anu.edu.au/graduate/papers/)*

1. Attendance

Relevant policy documents:
- *PhD Attendance Requirements*
- *Postgraduate Research Guide*

The University's policy on attendance currently allows variation to the University attendance requirement of 18 months for full-time candidates and 24 months for part-time candidates. Variation to these requirements must be negotiated by the candidate with the chair of the supervisory panel and the prescribed authority. The dates of periods of residency must be indicated by the chair in the candidate's annual report. However, the policy document should be more detailed with respect to the following issues:

- The policy should outline a process for making alternative attendance agreements more visible. Currently, attendance agreements that work well are those negotiated before the candidature begins.   By contrast, attendance agreements that have cause difficulties are ones that have been worked out during the candidature.
- The policy should be more explicit about how the supervisory chair and prescribed authority should exercise their discretion in negotiating alternative attendance agreements with candidates.

2. Supervisory Panel

Relevant policy documents:
- *Guidelines for supervision and candidature of doctoral research students*
- *Code of Practice for supervision in Higher Degree Research*
- *Supervision of Masters by research students*
- *Postgraduate Research Guide*

2.1. Role of supervisory panel members

The policy documents pertaining to supervision would need to incorporate the following recommendation for revision of the *Graduate Award Rules*, if this is adopted:

> *Recommendation 3.1 Clarity of responsibilities of primary supervisor*
> 1. "The chair of the supervisory panel has primary responsibility for the coordination of all aspects of the candidate's program. The primary supervisor has responsibility for the provision of advice about major research aspects of the candidature."
> 2. "The role of supervisory panel chair and primary supervisor can be assumed by the same person."
>
> (Report of the Working Party on Higher Degree Research)

The policy documents should provide further detail and explanations of the role of the panel members, including the following:
- The role of advisers.
- The chair's responsibility to ensure
    - adequate research supervision for the candidate, and
    - that all panel members are aware of their role in supervising the candidate and their responsibilities to the candidate.
- The role of a supervisory chair compared to a primary supervisor, when these two roles are taken on by two different people. (For example, it might be too much to expect the research expert in some fields also to have knowledge of the administrative side of the candidature, as might be the case for a primary supervisor who is not part of the University, or a new faculty member who may be the best research expert, but because of the level of administrative knowledge/experience, may not be an appropriate chair for the panel.)

2.2. Timeline for confirmation of panel

The Working Party recommended that the policy documents on supervisory panels should clearly outline the timing for confirmation of the supervisory panel as follows:
- Before admission, a provisional supervisor must be appointed.
- Within one month, a supervisory chair must be identified.
- Within 3 months, all members of the supervisory panel must be confirmed.

The policy documents should elaborate on the following issues:

- It is necessary to identify a 'provisional' supervisor before admission, but that person may not necessarily become the chair of the supervisory panel.
- The supervisory panel chair must be identified within 1 month and the make-up of the entire panel must be confirmed within 3 months by the prescribed authority. The prescribed authority should only need to sign off once all members of the panel have been nominated.
- The panel must consist of a supervisory panel chair and a primary supervisor. The remaining members may be supervisors or advisers.

2.3. Frequency of supervisory panel meetings

The policy documents pertaining to supervision would need to incorporate the following recommendation for revision of the *Graduate Award Rules*, if this is adopted:

> *Recommendation 3.3 Frequency of supervisory panel meetings*
> "The chair is responsible for convening the supervisory panel in an appropriate form, which should normally occur every six months and no less frequently than once per year, typically at the completion of the candidate's annual progress review."
>
> (Report of the Working Party on Higher Degree Research)

It is recognized that flexibility is necessary in arranging panel meeting. The policy documents should elaborate on issues such as:
- the varied forms that a panel meeting can take, such as a teleconference, or email input, when panel members are not in Canberra;
- flexibility in the timing of panel meetings, taking into account that coursework and fieldwork requirements will alter the timing of annual progress reviews in different disciplines.

3. Confirmation of Candidature/ progress reporting

Relevant policy documents:
- *Guidelines for supervision and candidature of doctoral research students*
- *Code of Practice for supervision in Higher Degree Research*
- *Postgraduate Research Guide*

The policy documents pertaining to supervision would need to incorporate the following recommendation for revision of the *Graduate Award Rules*, if this is adopted:

> *Recommendation 4. Confirmation of Candidature*
> "At or about the time of the first annual review, following the written and oral presentation, the prescribed authority, on advice from the supervisory panel, should recommend to the candidate in writing one of the following outcomes:
> (a) that the candidate continue with the PhD, or
> (b) that the candidate be evaluated again in 6 months time, or
> (c) that the candidate transfer to an MPhil, or
> (d) that the candidate's candidature be terminated."
>
> (Report of the Working Party on Higher Degree Research)

The policy documents need to clarify the progress reporting required of all PhD students.

Currently, detailed statements on academic progress reporting are given in the Postgraduate Students Guide (section 4.5. PhD Academic Progress) and on the Graduate Research School's archived news pages:

- http://www.anu.edu.au/graduate/news/archive.php?id=36
- http://www.anu.edu.au/graduate/current/studreports.php

The above documents could be updated and incorporated into the policy documents.

Further issues to be addressed in policy documents include:

- flexibility for different discipline areas to determine timing of reporting milestones, due to coursework and fieldwork considerations;
- reporting milestones that are compulsory for all PhD students, and those, such as the Mid-Term Review, that are determined by discipline area;
- the need for Colleges to have local guidelines and forms accessible to their students, indicating specific requirements of the College or discipline areas within the College (for examples see RSSS (http://rsss.anu.edu.au/studentguide.pdf), Faculty of Arts (http://arts.anu.edu.au/student_information/postgraduate/Thesis_Proposa_%20Review.pdf), CCR (http://www.anu.edu.au/culture/graduate_study.php)
- clearer guidelines on steps that can be taken when academic progress is not satisfactory (addressing in particular ramifications for international students).

4. Nomination of Examiners

Relevant policy documents:
- *Information for Candidates on the submission and examination of theses for the degree of doctor of philosophy*
- *Guidelines for supervision and candidature of doctoral research students*
- *Postgraduate Research Guide*

The policy documents pertaining to the examination process would need to incorporate the following recommendation for revision of the *Graduate Award Rules*, if this is adopted:

> *Recommendation 6.2. A candidate's involvement with nomination of examiners*
> 1. "A candidate should, under normal circumstances, be invited to suggest and/or comment on the suitability of possible examiners, but must not participate in the decision about the examiners who are to be appointed."
> 2. "Except in the course of an oral examination under rule 2.54, the identity of the examiners of a candidate's thesis should not be revealed to the candidate whose thesis is being examined or to the other examiners of the thesis."
>
> (Report of the Working Party on Higher Degree Research)

The policy documents should elaborate on the following issues:

- Candidates should be encouraged to participate in suggesting prospective examiners. However, they should not be told the identity of the nominated examiners until the examination process is complete.
- A procedure should be outlined for students to request the names of examiners after the process of examination is complete, assuming examiners agree to their identity being revealed.
- It should be stated that examiners of a candidate's thesis should not communicate with each other, in order to ensure the candidate receives independent decisions on the thesis under examination. All relevant policy documents should also state that if an examiner needs to get more information or clarification about the candidate's research,

communication should be via an intermediary at the ANU, not directly with the candidate's supervisor or with another examiner.

5. Submission of Theses

Relevant policy documents:
- *Information for Candidates on the submission and examination of theses for the degree of doctor of philosophy*
- *Guidelines for supervision and candidature of doctoral research students*
- *Postgraduate Research Guide*

5.1. Timing of the approval of alternative thesis formats

The policy documents pertaining to the submission of theses would need to incorporate the following recommendation for revision of the *Graduate Award Rules*, if this is adopted:

> *Recommendation 5.1. Timing of approval of alternate formats*
> "Wherever it is intended that the thesis include video recordings, film or other works of visual or sonic arts, submitted by the candidate for examination, the format of the thesis should be approved by the supervisory panel at the time of initial or annual review of progress, and approved by the DVC(E) or the prescribed authority in accordance with the Orders."
>
> (Report of the Working Party on Higher Degree Research)

The policy documents should emphasise the need for candidates to discuss the all components of their thesis and the format of the complete submission with the supervisory chair and other members of their panel early on in their candidature.

5.2. Guidelines for alternative theses formats

As College Deans take on the responsibility for all matters educational in their colleges, the approval of alternative theses formats, which currently resides with the DVC (Education), is likely to move to College Deans. At the same time, as communication technologies are being encouraged to play an ever increasing role in the dissemination of information, there is a greater move towards the inclusion of varied forms of multimedia in thesis submissions across a range of different disciplines. In the interest of consistency and quality assurance across the University, a new policy document on alternative theses formats seems timely.

The policy document could address issues relating to a range of alternative theses formats (not only multimedia), including, for example:
- requirements for theses that link together a series of published articles;
- acceptable multimedia elements in a thesis submission;
- criteria for relating components of the submission;
- requirements for creative components, such as an art or composition folio, or musical performance;
- appointment of examiners with appropriate qualifications to examine all or some of the components of the submission.

6. Oral Examination

Relevant policy documents:
- *Research Degree Oral Examination: Policy and Procedure*
- *Information for Candidates on the submission and examination of theses for the degree of doctor of philosophy*
- *Guidelines for supervision and candidature of doctoral research students*
- *Postgraduate Research Guide*

The Report of the Working Party on Higher Degree Research recommends that an oral examination be offered as a normal examination option for PhD candidates (*recommendation 6.1. Oral examination*). Currently the norm is to hold an oral examination only if the candidate's examiners recommend that the thesis be revised and resubmitted or that the thesis be failed.

If the oral examination is going to be a normal examination option for PhD candidates, the policy documents would need to address the following issues:

- A procedure would need to put in place by which students could request an oral examination.
- Different discipline areas would need to retain flexibility in offering an oral examination - in some areas, an oral examination is best kept for difficult cases, while in other areas, especially where joint PhD programs with other institutions are being explored, it is important to remove the impression that the oral examination is offered only in the case of failure.
- Oral examinations would need to be able to take varied forms - for example, not all examiners for an oral examination would need to be present in the same room. Arrangements that currently exist, such as telephone conferencing, video-conferencing or appointing an assessor in place of an examiner who is not available, would need to continue.
- Where an oral examination is desirable, awareness of and encouragement for this option should also occur at the College level and in the discipline areas.

7. Appeals

Relevant policy documents:
- *Information for Candidates on the submission and examination of theses for the degree of doctor of philosophy*
- *Guidelines for supervision and candidature of doctoral research students*
- *Postgraduate Research Guide*

The Report of the Working Party on Higher Degree Research recommends that, since the delegation for termination of candidature is to move from the DVC (Education) to the College Deans, the DVC (Education) could have a role as in independent arbiter in the appeals process. Furthermore, the Report recommends changing the period within which an appeal may be lodged from 3 months to 1 month.

If these recommendations are adopted, policy documents which outline the appeals process would need to incorporate these changes.

8. MPhil/Masters

Relevant policy documents:
- *Supervision of Masters by research students*
- *Code of Practice for supervision in Higher Degree Research*
- *Postgraduate Research Guide*

The Report of the Working Party on Higher Degree Research recommends that the *Graduate Award Rules* set out more explicitly rules that relate to Master by research degrees (*recommendation 1.2. Clarity in the Rules with respect to Master by research degrees).*

In any policy revision process, the clarity of information relating to MPhil or other Research Masters degrees should carefully considered.

9. Relationship between Rules and Policy Documents

The Report of the Working Party on Higher Degree Research recommends that the *Graduate Award Rules* be reorganized into a more accessible document for all users in the University community (*recommendation 1.1 Reorganisation of the Graduate Award Rules).*

If this recommendation is adopted, a revision of all policy documents will be necessary to ensure that references to sections of the *Graduate Award Rules* are up to date in all policy documents. This revision process would present an ideal opportunity to clarify the relationship between the policy documents and the *Graduate Award Rules.* It would also present an opportunity to consider moving toward an integrated policy handbook on the web instead of a series of separate policy documents for higher degree research.