

POLICY FOR MASTER'S AND DOCTORAL DEGREES

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This policy should be understood and read in conjunction with the University's Tuition, Research, Admission, and Assessment Policies and the Code of Ethics, and aligned to the sets of tools that have been developed for their implementation. It follows the vision of the Research Policy in its aims to undertake research and knowledge production that is guided by integrity, quality and rigour, and applies this to postgraduate research, with particular reference to Master's and Doctoral research. In particular, this policy speaks to the enhancement and ongoing monitoring of quality assurance for higher degrees at UNISA.
- 1.2 This Policy and the Procedures Manual which accompanies it are research-based and benchmarked for the UNISA context against a number of best practice guides and guidelines.¹
- 1.3 This policy describes the broad framework for Master's and Doctoral degrees. The specific procedures are dealt with in the *Procedures for Studies for Master's and Doctoral Degrees*.
- 1.4 This policy also defines the role of the Senate Higher Degrees Committee in relation to College structures.

2. INNOVATION AND TRANSFORMATIVE MANAGEMENT OF POSTGRADUATE DEGREES

The Senate Higher Degrees Committee makes formal recommendations to Senate with regard to new programmes pertaining to Master's and Doctoral degrees, in particular new interdisciplinary Master's degrees, self-reflexive research and commissioned research undertaken by Master's and Doctoral students, as well as new forms of abbreviation for qualifications for consideration by Senate.

3. QUALITY ASSURANCE ARRANGEMENTS FOR MASTER'S AND DOCTORAL PROGRAMMES

The following structures and academic processes are in place to give effect to the policy:

3.1 Senate

Senate is the highest decision-making structure for academic matters.

¹ Including CHE's *A Good Practice Guide to Quality Management of Research*; Council of Australian Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies: *Framework for Best Practice in Doctoral Education in Australia*; HEQC, HEQF, Nadeosa, DETC Linked Criteria; QAA (Quality Assurance Agency UK); Guidelines from various universities internationally and within South Africa, including the Universities of Cape Town, Stellenbosch, Pretoria, Cambridge (UK), London Metropolitan University and Duke University (USA)

3.2 Senate Higher Degrees Committee

- 3.2.1 Formulates policy on higher degrees.
- 3.2.2 Is responsible for implementation and waiver of higher degree rules, policies and guidelines and may approve the waiver of these rules in specific circumstances.
- 3.2.3 Recommends to Senate the approval or not of any new higher degree qualification.
- 3.2.4 Ensures quality of higher degrees by devising and implementing appropriate quality assurance measures.

3.3 College Executive Committee and/or College Higher Degrees Committee

- 3.3.1 Is recognised as the body responsible for quality assurance of higher degrees at College level.
- 3.3.2 Reports to the Senate Higher Degrees Committee on all matters concerning higher degrees.
- 3.3.3 Recommends all Master's and Doctoral examination results and refers problem cases to the Senate Higher Degrees Committee.
- 3.3.4 Signs off all examination reports received from the non-examining chair and refers all cases dealing with minority examination reports to the Chairperson of the Senate Higher Degrees Committee.
- 3.3.5 Maintains a database of external examiners for recommendation to Senate Higher Degrees Committee.

3.4 College Examinations Committee²

- 3.4.1 Is a sub-committee of the College Higher Degrees Committee.
- 3.4.2 Receives the names of all external examiners recommended by Departments in the College and makes recommendations to the College Higher Degrees Committee/College Executive Committee on their appointment.

3.5 Departmental/School Higher Degrees Committee

- 3.5.1 Forwards names of possible external examiners to the College Higher Degrees Committee.

4. ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

- 4.1 The **minimum qualification** for admission to master's and doctoral studies is provided for in the HEQF. Senate may approve additional requirements for admission to master's and doctoral studies.
- 4.2 The Calendars of the respective Colleges reflect the Senate approved requirements for the postgraduate qualifications offered in that College.
- 4.3 Admission procedures are dealt with in the *Procedures for Studies for Master's and Doctoral Degrees*.

² Where deemed necessary by Colleges
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- 4.4 The principles of open and distance learning are applied to Master's and Doctoral admissions, in particular the need for managed access procedures and appropriate guidance at registration.
- 4.5 The Senate Higher Degrees Committee approves any departure from the procedures for formal admission to Master's and Doctoral degrees.
- 4.6 University RPL procedures may also be applied where suitable and relevant, and with departmental approval, as an access route to Master's and Doctoral studies.

5. SUPERVISION AGREEMENT/CODE OF CONDUCT

- 5.1 After all due procedures regarding admission have been finalised, UNISA contracts successful candidates by means of a formal letter that is specific to the individual applicant. The terms of the letter are binding on the institution and, upon acceptance, on the student. The letter will refer to or enclose other information, for example references to institutional web pages and *myUnisa*, supplemented by any necessary information. The letter and enclosures will include:
 - 5.1.1 fees as determined by the University;
 - 5.1.2 the expected period of study for which the student is enrolled;
 - 5.1.3 the requirements which the institution places upon the student (for example, attendance of induction and orientation workshops, progress reports, contact with supervisors) and arrangements for enrolment and registration; and
 - 5.1.4 references to the institution's regulations, sources of funding and other relevant information for a research degree programme, all of which will normally be available via the institutional web page or in printed documents/DVD.
- 5.2 UNISA expects students and supervisors to adhere to a **supervision agreement/code of conduct** which must be signed by both parties as soon as a supervisor has been appointed for a Master's by research or a Doctoral programme. This code is UNISA's assurance that quality relationships will be upheld by both supervisors and students for the entire period of registration for the degree. An example of such a code of conduct is to be found in the *Procedures for Studies for Master's and Doctoral Degrees*.

6. PROGRESSION OF STUDENTS

- 6.1 UNISA will ensure that there is **sufficient capacity** to support Master's and Doctoral students and will provide a context in which high quality research is taking place. This includes:
 - 6.1.1 appointing supervisors who have shown demonstrable research achievement/output in the subject, such as journal publications, books, chapters in books, NRF-rated scholars;
 - 6.1.2 making arrangements, where necessary, for a supervisory team to ensure that the student has an identifiable point of contact at all times during the period of study. Such a team may include co-supervisors (particularly for international students), mentors, tutors;
 - 6.1.3 putting in place suitable ODL arrangements for mentorship and guidance which may include adjunct lecturers, tutors, mentors and postdoctoral fellows either within UNISA or by means of collaborative arrangements with other institutions;
 - 6.1.4 refusing to overload any one lecturer with too many Master's and Doctoral students. Colleges will take into account the experience and workload of a supervisor before allocating students for supervision;

- 6.1.5 ensuring that students are allocated to staff equitably and according to their rank and expertise;
 - 6.1.6 requiring all supervisors to attend compulsory training sessions which include orientation for first-time supervisors and re-skilling for experienced supervisors. All tutors, mentors and postdoctoral fellows who are involved in the supervision process are also required to attend such training.
- 6.2 Readmission to postgraduate studies will, in accordance with the UNISA Admission Policy, follow the following criteria:
- 6.2.1 During the first and every subsequent year of study the student must demonstrate academic activity to the satisfaction of the supervisor;
 - 6.2.2 In the event of the student failing to meet this requirement, s/he will be admitted to another year of study. However, if a student continues not to demonstrate academic activity, s/he will not be admitted to a further year of study at the University, except with the express approval of the Executive Dean of the College in which the student is registered;
 - 6.2.3 A student registered for a Master's by coursework programme should endeavour to complete the programme within three years;
 - 6.2.4 A student registered for a research Master's programme should endeavour to complete the programme within four years. A student may apply to the Registrar for one additional year of study. The Registrar will consider the application only if it is recommended by the Executive Dean of the College in which the student is registered;
 - 6.2.5 A student registered for a doctoral programme should endeavour to complete the programme within five years. A student may apply to the Registrar for one additional year of study. The Registrar will consider the application only if it is recommended by the Executive Dean of the College in which the student is registered. The Executive Dean approves the application and notifies the Registrar.

7. ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

7.1 Assessment of Master's and Doctoral students

- 7.1.1 Assessment of Master's and Doctoral students will be clear, rigorous, fair and consistent and will include input from two examiners for a Master's degree of which at least one is external and three examiners for Doctoral degrees, of which at least two must be external with one being preferably an international examiner of scholarly repute³.
- 7.1.2 External examiners must be recognised experts in their fields and must not be attached to or affiliated with UNISA⁴.
- 7.1.3 All examiners are recommended by the relevant Departmental Chairperson and their names are forwarded for appointment to the College Higher Degrees Committee/College Executive Committee or a committee set up in the College/or the School for Business Leadership for this purpose such as an Examinations Committee.
- 7.1.4 Such appointment is made upon receipt of an abbreviated curriculum vitum from the potential external examiner containing evidence of experience in examining

³ Examiners should hold at least the equivalent degree to that which is being examined.

⁴ This means that external examiners should not be retirees of UNISA nor should they be recently qualified postgraduate students of UNISA.

higher degrees and appropriate research expertise in the field of study of the student.

7.1.5 The supervisor may not be a member of the examining panel but should submit a non-evaluative report on the candidate after the dissertation has been submitted for examination. This report will not be sent to examiners but is held by the non-examining chairperson.

7.1.6 A non-examining Chairperson who must be a senior member of the department concerned (or a Director, the chairperson of another department, a Deputy Executive Dean or an Executive Dean) should be appointed to oversee the assessment procedures and ensure a fair outcome for the degree.

7.2 Complaints and appeals

7.2.1 All Master's and Doctoral students have the right to appeal against unfair practice in supervision.

7.2.2 Complaints and appeals not dealt with satisfactorily by the Chairperson of Department are addressed to the relevant Executive Dean in the College or to the Director of Graduate Studies, where these exist in Colleges.

7.2.3 Appeals are monitored by the Senate Higher Degrees Committee.

8. SELF-REFLEXIVE MONITORING

Self-reflexive monitoring of all Master's and Doctoral students is undertaken by means of a central tracking system and a database which is updated regularly by the Research Directorate. Such monitoring will include:

8.1 submission and completion times and rates;

8.2 pass, referral and fail rates;

8.3 drop-out rates;

8.4 the number of appeals and complaints, the reasons for them, and how many are upheld;

8.5 analysis of comments from examiners;

8.6 information on employment destinations and career paths of former students (using the Alumni office records).

9. ETHICAL CONDUCT

UNISA will ensure that all Master's and Doctoral students are advised of the necessity to adhere to good practice in research, of the need for ethical conduct and of the penalties attached to research misconduct, including plagiarism, by directing the student to the guidance contained in the admissions letter (see point 6.1 above) and the appropriate policies in this regard including the Plagiarism Policy and the Research Ethics Policy which are available on the website. Supervisors are also bound by ethical norms to protect students from abuse or financial exploitation.

10. FINANCIAL AID

UNISA will ensure that Colleges supply all Master's and Doctoral students with the necessary information regarding financial aid policies and procedures.

11. ALIGNMENT

All College procedures for Master's and Doctoral studies are aligned to this Policy.

12. IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICY

Related policies of the former institutions that were in force prior to the commencement of this Policy are replaced with effect from the date on which Council approves this Policy. Students will be advised of the existence of this Policy and related Procedures.

