

THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG
Graduate School

**Guidelines and Procedures for Thesis Submission/Assessment for
Research Postgraduate and Taught Doctoral Programmes**

(This document should be read in conjunction with the “General Information for Thesis Preparation and Submission – A Guide for Research Postgraduate and Taught Doctoral Students”, the “General Regulations Governing Postgraduate Studies” and the “Research and Thesis Writing” available at the Graduate School homepage.)

1. Appointment of Supervisor

1.1 Procedure

1.1.1 Graduate Divisions should make known to current as well as potential students the topics/areas available for thesis research, together with the names of the teachers who can supervise these topics/areas.

1.1.2 The Graduate Panel has the responsibility and complete authority to appoint and to reassign academic staff to students for supervision, provided that the supervisor/co-supervisor(s) met the eligibility requirements on supervising students. The student, on the other hand, should make his/her preference known to the Graduate Panel. There should be only one designated Supervisor. In the case of co-supervision, the Graduate Panel shall designate who will be the Supervisor. All supervisory appointments have to be reported to the Dean of the Graduate School.

1.2 Eligibility of Supervisor(s)

1.2.1 For Master’s students

1.2.1.1 The Supervisor should be a full-time member of the academic staff⁽¹⁾ with an academic title of Assistant Professor⁽²⁾ or above at CUHK, and in addition should either

- (a) have held a Ph.D. degree or equivalent⁽³⁾ for at least one year; or
- (b) have held a Master’s degree *by research* (e.g. M.Phil.) or a relevant professional Master’s degree (e.g. M.A. (City Planning), M.Arch., M.F.A., M.S.W.) for at least three years, and have (i) successfully co-supervised an M.Phil.⁽⁴⁾ thesis or equivalent, or (ii) successfully supervised an M.Phil.⁽⁴⁾ thesis or equivalent at another institution.

1.2.2 For doctoral students

1.2.2.1 The Supervisor should be a full-time member of the academic staff⁽¹⁾ with an academic title of Assistant Professor or above at CUHK, and in addition should have held a Ph.D. degree or equivalent⁽³⁾ for at least three years, and have either

- (a) successfully supervised an M.Phil.⁽⁴⁾ thesis or equivalent, or
- (b) successfully co-supervised a Ph.D. (or Ed.D. for Doctor of Education students; D.Nurs. for Doctor of Nursing students, Psy.D. for Doctor of Psychology students) thesis or equivalent, or
- (c) successfully supervised a Ph.D. (or Ed.D. for Doctor of Education students; D.Nurs. for Doctor of Nursing students; Psy.D. for Doctor of Psychology students) thesis or

equivalent at another institution.

1.2.3 Supervisors who do not meet the requirement

1.2.3.1 Intended Supervisors who do not meet the requirements as specified in 1.2.1.1(a), (b) and 1.2.2.1(a) – (c) may

- (a) be recommended by the Graduate Division and approved by the Dean of the Faculty, considerations to be based mainly on experience in research; or
- (b) act only in a co-supervisory capacity together with another supervisor who satisfies the above conditions or has been exceptionally approved.

1.2.3.2 Exceptions to 1.2.3.1 may be granted by the Executive Committee of the Graduate Council.

1.2.4 New supervisors at the rank of Assistant Professor should attend the Supervisory Training Module offered by the Graduate School and the Centre for Learning Enhancement and Research (CLEAR).

1.2.5 Emeritus/honorary/adjunct professor and visiting teacher cannot serve as Supervisor.

1.3 Eligibility of Co-supervisors

1.3.1 For both Master's and doctoral students, the Co-supervisor should be a full-time member of the academic staff⁽¹⁾ with an academic title of Assistant Professor or above at CUHK and have held a Ph.D. degree or equivalent unless as approved in 1.2.3.1(b).

1.3.2 Emeritus/honorary/adjunct professors and visiting teachers cannot serve as Co-supervisors. However, in special cases, the aforementioned categories of teaching staff of the University may serve as Co-supervisors with the approval of the Dean of the Graduate School.

1.4 For doctoral candidates who are members of the academic staff

1.4.1 In the case of a doctoral candidate who is also a full-time member of the academic staff at the rank of Assistant Professor of the University, all Supervisors must be teachers of the rank of Associate Professor or above. Exceptions will have to be considered case by case by the Executive Committee of the Graduate Council.

1.4.2 Furthermore, if the candidate is of the rank of Associate Professor or above, the appointment of Supervisor will have to be submitted to the Executive Committee of the Graduate Council for approval.

1.5 Continuity of Supervision

1.5.1 Heads of Graduate Divisions must ensure that a suitable Co-supervisor (who may become Supervisor when necessary) is appointed as soon as possible when the Supervisor for whatever reason becomes unable to supervise before the student's thesis/portfolio is completed. A teacher may continue to serve as Supervisor/Co-supervisor of the student within three months after his/her retirement/resignation.

1.6 Maximum number of students to each Supervisor

1.6.1 A teacher should not at any one time supervise more than a specified number of research postgraduate/taught doctoral students, to be determined by each Faculty (student numbers are

in fte, including continuing students⁽⁵⁾).

Arts	6
Business Administration	7
Education ⁽⁶⁾	6
Engineering	6
Law	5
Medicine	5
Science	6
Social Science	6

- 1.6.2 When counting the student numbers of each supervisor, part-time student and continuing student will be counted based on its fte. If a student is supervised by a Supervisor and a Co-supervisor, calculation will base on the contribution of the Supervisor/Co-supervisor.
- 1.6.3 The Head of Graduate Division may give approval to a teacher (other than himself/herself) to exceed the limit by two, but all cases have to be reported to the Dean of the Graduate School. Further exceptions and exceptions for the Head of Graduate Division himself/herself may be considered by application to the Dean of the Graduate School.

2. Procedures prior to Thesis Submission

2.1 Declaration of Intention to Submit Thesis

- 2.1.1 Graduate Divisions should remind students to complete and return the “Declaration Form on Intention to Submit Thesis/Portfolio” (Form TAS-1) to the Graduate Division, declaring the proposed date of thesis submission, together with the intended thesis titles. The completed form together with the approval from the Supervisor and Head of the Graduate Division should reach the Graduate School four months before actual submission. Students should not be allowed to submit thesis when they are on leave. Since the Congregation for conferment of higher degrees is usually held in November/December, students who submit theses/portfolios by the end of May (for doctoral students) or the end of June (for Master’s students) would normally have the degree conferred within the same year. If revision/re-writing is required, students who submit the final version of thesis before August 31 of the same year would normally have the degree conferred within the same year as well.

2.2 Thesis Title

- 2.2.1 The thesis title should be written in either English or Chinese. Subsequent change in thesis title should be submitted by completing and returning the “Application for Change of Thesis/Portfolio Title” (Form TAS-2), to the Supervisor and the Head of Graduate Division for approval.

2.3 Deferment of Thesis Submission

- 2.3.1 Request to defer the date of thesis submission should be submitted by completing and returning the “Application for Deferment of Submission of Thesis/Portfolio” (Form TAS-3) to the Supervisor and the Head of Graduate Division for approval. Deferment in submission of thesis/portfolio will result in delay of student’s graduation.
- 2.3.2 Deferment must NOT exceed the student’s maximum study period.

3. Thesis Assessment Committee

3.1 Formation and Composition

3.1.1 After approving the student's proposed thesis/portfolio title and date of submission, the Graduate Division should proceed to form the Thesis/Assessment Committee with the following composition, by completing the nomination form (Form TAD-1A/1B/1C/1D) which must be endorsed by the Board of Department concerned and returned to the Graduate School four months before the student's thesis submission:

Chairman : Head of Graduate Division or his/her representative with an academic title of Associate Professor or above at CUHK
(The Supervisor/Co-supervisor should NOT serve as the Chairman of the Thesis Assessment Committee)

Internal Examiners : At least three Internal Examiners (student's Supervisor, the Head of Graduate Division or his/her nominee as Chairman, and a third member from within or without the Graduate Division, i.e. "Other" Internal Examiner)

External Examiner : One⁽⁷⁾

3.1.2 Nominations of External Examiners have to be submitted by the Graduate School to the Senate and the University Council for approval.

3.1.3 For any subsequent change of membership, the Head of Graduate Division should complete and forward the form on "Change of Thesis Assessment Committee Membership" (Form TAD-2A) to the Graduate School for follow-up actions.

3.2 Eligibility of Examiners

3.2.1 "Other" Internal Examiner

3.2.1.1 The "Other" Internal Examiners must be academic staff⁽¹⁾ of the University with an academic title of Assistant Professor or above, except that within three months after his/her retirement/resignation, a teacher may continue to serve as Internal Examiner. Intended Internal Examiners who do not meet the requirements may serve only with the approval of the Dean of the Graduate School.

3.2.2 External Examiner

(a) External Examiners must not be members of the academic staff of the University. Anyone who has been on the teaching staff of the University or who has taken part in the teaching of the candidates, even in a visiting capacity, within three years and anyone expected to join before assessment is completed, is not eligible for appointment.

(b) External Examiners should be at least Senior Lecturers in the Commonwealth system or Associate Professors in the American system. In case an External Examiner of inappropriate rank is nominated, the Head of Graduate Division concerned has to provide full justification, not only that the nominee is suitable, but also that no other suitable academic of appropriate rank (world-wide) is available, taking into consideration the language used in the thesis/portfolio. Detailed curriculum vitae of the nominee must also be given. Such nominations have to be first endorsed by the Executive Committee of the

Graduate Council, before submission to the Senate for consideration. However, authority has been delegated to the Dean of the Graduate School to endorse nominations of second External Examiners (if any) for doctoral and Master's students of inappropriate rank.

3.3 Responsibility of the Thesis Assessment Committee

3.3.1 The External and Internal Examiners evaluate the student's thesis/portfolio for acceptance for the degree sought and provide the student with an opportunity to defend the thesis/portfolio. If the External Examiner for a doctoral student is unable to be present at the oral examination, a second External Examiner with the same responsibilities as the first External Examiner must be appointed to assess the student's performance in the oral examination.

3.4 Notification of Appointment

3.4.1 The Graduate Division informs the Internal Examiners of their appointment to the Thesis Assessment Committee, with the necessary information.

3.4.2 The Graduate School, after approval by the Senate and the University Council, issues invitation letters to External Examiners. It will continue to liaise with the External Examiners until the completion of the thesis/portfolio assessment.

4. **Submission of Thesis/Portfolio**

4.1 Students should submit copies of their theses/portfolios to the Graduate Division concerned for onward transmission to the internal examiners, and at the same time submit another copy to the Graduate School for onward transmission to the first/second External Examiner, together with relevant assessment report forms (Forms TAE-1/2). Students are not allowed to submit thesis unless the External Examiner has accepted the invitation and should not contact the External Examiner(s) on matters related to thesis examination.

4.2 In case the Supervisor finds that the thesis is not suitable for submission, s/he should forward the thesis to the internal examiners for a decision. If there is any disagreement among the internal examiners, the case should be referred to the Head of the Graduate Division.

4.3 Graduate Divisions may opt to request students to submit theses via Veriguide for checking of possible plagiarism.

4.4 Students on leave should not submit thesis.

5. **Basis for Assessment**

5.1 The eligibility of a student for award of degree is assessed by the Thesis Assessment Committee on the basis of:

- (i) the thesis or portfolio,
- (ii) an oral examination, and
- (iii) if required, a written examination.

6. **Grading System for Thesis/Portfolio**

6.1 The grading system for thesis/portfolio is as follows:

Grade	Status	Action
I	Pass	If revision is not required, then the student will be recommended for award of degree. If revision is required, then the revised thesis should be inspected by supervisor(s) before the student is recommended for award of degree.
II	This submission NOT passed. Re-submission allowed and re-examination required.	Revised thesis/portfolio to be re-submitted to Thesis Assessment Committee.
III	Failure - no re-submission allowed	Student to discontinue studies
IV	Recommended for award of research Master's degree (for research doctoral programme only)	Research doctoral student recommended for award of research Master's degree. Graduate Division to provide justification for consideration of the Executive Committee of the Graduate Council.

7. Oral Examination

7.1 Timing and Presence of the Examiners

7.1.1 After dispatching copies of thesis/portfolio submitted by the student to the internal examiners, giving the latter sufficient time to read the thesis/portfolio, the Chairman of the Thesis Assessment Committee should proceed to organize the oral examination. This should not be held later than two months after thesis submission for both doctoral and Master's students. Requests for delay should be submitted to the Dean of the Graduate School for approval.

7.1.2 At least one week's notice should be given by the Committee to the student and the examiners involved regarding the oral examination.

7.1.3 Presence of the External Examiner at the oral examination is required only for doctoral candidates. It is, however, not compulsory for Doctor of Education, Doctor of Nursing and Doctor of Psychology students. In case the External Examiner is unable to attend the oral examination, the Graduate Division should appoint a second External Examiner who will be present at the oral examination.

7.1.4 If an overseas External Examiner has to attend the oral examination in person, the Graduate Division has to comply with the visa requirements of the Immigration Department of HKSAR. Relevant information is available at the website of the Personnel Office: <https://www.per.cuhk.edu.hk/BenefitsPersonnelServices/ImmigrationandVisaMatters/InformationforDepartmentsUnits/tabid/258/Default.aspx>

7.2 Conduct of the Oral Examination

7.2.1 The Chairman of the Thesis Assessment Committee controls the conduct of the oral examination to ensure that questions are put fairly and that the student is given adequate opportunity to answer them.

- 7.2.2 Even if the Examiners consider that a student's thesis/portfolio is not of sufficient standard for the award of degree, a student may, at the discretion of the Thesis Assessment Committee, be given an oral examination to defend his/her thesis/portfolio.
- 7.2.3 The oral examination covers not only the subject matter of the student's thesis/portfolio but also the knowledge in related fields deemed essential to his/her field of specialization. Video conferencing and tele-conferencing would be acceptable as a means of conducting the oral examinations if any of the examiners cannot attend the oral examination in person. Graduate Division Heads should (a) record this in assessment reports and (b) ensure that visual materials were transmitted clearly, if necessary. Conducting the oral examination outside Hong Kong would also be acceptable, in cases where all the internal and external examiners and the students concerned were attending the same conference overseas. However, this should be recorded in the assessment reports and the Graduate Division should not force the students to do so.
- 7.2.4 If the Thesis Assessment Committee consisted of two "Other" Internal Examiners, and one of them cannot attend the oral examination, in very special circumstances, the Committee can proceed to conduct oral examination for the student. The Internal Examiner, who cannot attend the oral examination, should forward the questions to the Thesis Assessment Committee in advance. The above arrangement should be recorded in the assessment reports.

8. Written Examination

- 8.1 Any written examination, if required, is to be arranged by the Graduate Division concerned. The Graduate Division should keep record of the written examination and would be requested to provide the record if circumstances require.

9. Assessment Reports

9.1 Individual Report from Each Examiner

- 9.1.1 Examiners are normally given a period of five weeks for assessment of thesis/portfolio. Each Internal Examiner has to submit the completed assessment report Form TAD-3 to the Chairman of Thesis Committee within two weeks after the oral examination for assignment of Final Grade on "Summary of Grades of Thesis/Portfolio" (Form TAD-5).
- 9.1.2 Upon receiving the reports from the External Examiners, the Graduate School then forwards the External Examiner's reports (Form TAE-1/TAE-2) to the Head of Graduate Division.
- 9.1.3 The assessment report is divided into two parts. Part A is to be released to the student and Part B remains confidential to the Graduate School and the Thesis Assessment Committee unless required by the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance to be released to the student concerned upon request. To ensure the confidentiality of grades, the grades of individual Examiners must not be divulged to the student.

9.2 Action by Graduate Division Head/Chairman of Thesis Assessment Committee

- 9.2.1 When all reports have been returned, the Head of Graduate Division/Chairman of Thesis Assessment Committee should complete the following forms:
- (a) "Summary of Grades for Thesis/Portfolio" (Form TAD-5) (to be completed by Chairman of Thesis Assessment Committee)
 - (b) "Notification to Student on Results of Thesis/Portfolio Assessment" (Form TAD-6) (to be

- completed by the Head of Graduate Division)
- (c) “Reply Proforma on Fulfilment of Graduation Requirements” (Form TAD-7) (to be completed by the Head of Graduate Division)

9.2.2 The Head of Graduate Division should also copy the forms (together with relevant documents) to the following parties:

- (a) Graduate School: Forms TAD-5, TAD-6, TAD-7 (with a copy of Internal Examiners’ reports)
- (b) Supervisor: Forms TAD-5, TAD-6, TAD-7 (with a copy of all Examiners’ assessment reports)
- (c) Students: Form TAD-6 (with Part A of all Examiners’ assessment reports)

9.3 Follow-up Actions on Different Final Grades

9.3.1 Upon receipt of all Examiners’ reports, the Thesis Assessment Committee Chairman must decide on a final grade within four weeks and, on the “Notification to Student on Results of Thesis/Portfolio Assessment” (Form TAD-6), inform the student of the final assessment result and the follow-up actions required, as well as the name of the External Examiner so that student can put it on the cover when submitting the final version of thesis, if so required by the Graduate Division.

9.3.2 Grade I (Pass)

9.3.2.1 If revision is not required, the student should be informed to submit the final version of thesis/portfolio (for a doctoral student, also the completed Agreement Form for Microfilming of Thesis/Portfolio) to the Graduate School within two weeks by completing the “Form for Submission of Thesis/Portfolio (Final Version) for Archive/Microfilming” (Form TAS-7) and “Electronic Thesis Submission Form for Final Version of Thesis” (Form TAS-8).

9.3.2.2 If revisions are required, the Supervisor(s) must ensure that corrections are made satisfactorily by a specified period, normally no later than three months, and the student should be informed to submit Form TAS-7 and Form TAS-8 by the deadline.

9.3.2.3 A student who fails to submit the final version of thesis within one year from the date as specified by the Thesis Assessment Committee shall be required to discontinue studies at the University, unless otherwise approved by the Executive Committee of the Graduate Council.

9.3.3 Grade II (This submission NOT passed. Re-submission allowed and re-examination required.)

9.3.3.1 A final Grade II by the Thesis Assessment Committee Chairman means the thesis/portfolio is not passed. The student should be informed to submit the revised thesis/portfolio to the whole Thesis Assessment Committee within 12 months from the date of the official notification of the result of the first examination. If the student will have exceeded the maximum period of study, s/he should submit an application to extend the maximum study end date.

9.3.3.2 Apart from ruling in regard to thesis re-submission, the Thesis Assessment Committee may decide whether or not the student should be re-assessed by oral examination.

9.3.3.3 Only one re-submission of thesis/portfolio is allowed unless exceptional approval is granted by the Executive Committee of the Graduate Council on extension of re-submission deadline

and/or further re-submission of the thesis.

9.3.4 Grade III (Failure - no re-submission allowed)

9.3.4.1 A final Grade III by the Thesis Assessment Committee Chairman will result in discontinuation of studies. The recommendation will be submitted for approval by the Executive Committee of the Graduate Council. Action will be taken accordingly by the Graduate School.

9.3.5 Grade IV (Recommended for award of research Master's degree (for research doctoral programmes only))

9.3.5.1 A final Grade IV by the Thesis Assessment Committee Chairman for a research doctoral thesis/portfolio means award of a research Master's degree instead. The Head of Graduate Division must submit justification to the Executive Committee of the Graduate Council for consideration.

10. Recommendation for Award of Degree

10.1 A student may be recommended for award of the degree sought after

- (i) s/he has completed the course work and other requirements of the programme, if any, and
- (ii) his/her thesis/portfolio is deemed satisfactory without any revision or amendment, or
- (iii) amendments have been made to the Examiner's satisfaction and the final version of the thesis/portfolio has been submitted to the Graduate School.

10.2 The Head of Graduate Division has to confirm, on the basis of the assessment of the student's thesis/portfolio and the results of the course work completed by the student, whether the student has fulfilled the graduation requirements and is recommended for award of degree or otherwise, by completing the "Reply Proforma on Fulfilment of Graduation Requirement" (Form TAD-7).

10.3 The list of students recommended for award of degree shall be submitted to the Executive Committee of the Graduate Council for endorsement and to the Senate for approval.

11. Copyright of Thesis/Portfolio

11.1 The University decided in 2007-08 that students should hold the copyright ownership of their thesis/portfolio. However, to provide a wider accessibility of the theses for scholastic and academic purposes, students are requested to sign an agreement to grant the University a worldwide irrevocable, non-exclusive right in respect of the copyright in the thesis/portfolio for the purpose of making copies, abstracts, reproducing or otherwise dealing with the theses/portfolios by whatever means, including but not limited to, digitizing, storing, reproducing, and distributing the theses/portfolios in any media and in any format, provided that any and all such acts are only for scholastic and academic purpose and with proper acknowledgement of authorship.

11.2 For theses/portfolios submitted before the effective year, the University retains the copyright of each of the theses/portfolios submitted. A request may be made to the Dean of the Graduate School to grant permission to release this copyright to anyone intending to use a part or whole of the materials in any thesis/portfolio in a proposed publication. The students/graduates are expected to give due acknowledgement of their Supervisors' guidance (in case of a translation, students should seek the approval of the original author). Photocopying of theses/portfolios may be made for "fair use" for the purposes of research or

private study, without the express permission of the Dean of the Graduate School, in accordance with the prevailing guidelines for copyrighted works.

12. Confidentiality of Thesis/Portfolio

- 12.1 Normally, requests for keeping theses/portfolios confidential will not be approved.
- 12.2 Students and Supervisors who wish to protect potential patent rights (which would belong to the University if the work is done as part of normal duties) should exercise care to exclude sensitive material from the thesis.
- 12.3 Approval for confidentiality for theses/portfolios for reasons other than patent application may be granted only in exceptional circumstances, normally up to two years. Each case will have to be submitted to the Executive Committee of the Graduate Council for consideration.

Footnotes

- ⁽¹⁾ Please refer to Statute 19 on the definition of Academic Staff.
- ⁽²⁾ For M.F.A. students, a teacher with an academic title of Assistant Professor or above and with teaching experience of at least five years at this University need not have a higher degree.
- ⁽³⁾ For the Faculty of Medicine, a relevant Membership/Fellowship from a professional college, or research-based M.D. is to be regarded as the equivalent of a Ph.D. degree. For Doctor of Nursing students, a teacher with a relevant Doctor of Nursing degree is regarded as equivalent to having a Ph.D. degree.
- ⁽⁴⁾ For the Graduate Division of Social Work, M.S.W. is accepted. For Doctor of Education, those who have successfully supervised two M.Ed. projects are accepted.
- ⁽⁵⁾ Continuing students also require staff time in supervision. Moreover, including such students in the allowed maximum will provide further incentive to promote timely completion.
- ⁽⁶⁾ For Doctor of Education students, 1 fte is counted as 2/3 of an RPg student when counting the student numbers of each supervisor.
- ⁽⁷⁾ Or two for (i) part-time doctoral students who are full-time staff members of the University of the rank of Assistant Professor or above, and (ii) doctoral students where the first External Examiner cannot attend the oral examination. One additional External Examiner for Master's students may also, exceptionally and upon justification, be appointed if the thesis requires an additional expert to assess.

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