



The University has approved conditions for the award of Master of Philosophy (MPhil) degrees. These notes are issued to provide examiners with additional guidance which may be of assistance in assessing MPhil theses.

1 PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING THE DEGREE

1.1 The MPhil is an award made by the University to a candidate who has successfully completed a program of advanced coursework and research. An MPhil is distinct from the Masters by Research programs which are offered by individual Faculties. The MPhil differs from other Masters by Research programs in that its duration is typically shorter and it requires the candidate to complete advanced coursework at a level proscribed by the Higher Degree Committee or equivalent. The degree typically comprises the equivalent of one semester¹ of coursework with the remainder of the degree (two semesters or approximately 12 months) allocated to the thesis. The minimum duration for an MPhil is two semesters and the maximum is four semesters, full-time equivalent. The program is regulated and supervised by the University and, except in special cases, the work for the degree is carried out in the University. A candidate works under supervision, but is expected to demonstrate some independence of thought.

1.2 The award of the degree should also be taken to certify that a candidate has:-

- 1.2.1 Been trained in the techniques relevant to the field of research and is capable of applying and adopting these techniques to other research projects; and
- 1.2.2 Become sufficiently familiar with an area of the discipline within which the candidate has worked to plan and execute a substantial piece of scholarship and/or research.

1.3 As with all its other awards (with the partial exception of the higher doctorates) the University's function is that of an educational institution in the fullest sense and not merely that of an accrediting body. As a result, the University in conferring a Master of Philosophy is:-

- 1.3.1 Proclaiming that a candidate has reached a required standard of achievement;
- 1.3.2 Proclaiming indirectly what this standard is;
- 1.3.3 Claiming to have contributed significantly to that candidate's academic development; and
- 1.3.4 Acknowledging that the candidate has made a contribution to the academic life of the University.

2 ASSESSING THE QUALITY OF A MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY THESIS

2.1 A thesis has a form of presentation different from that of a published paper or review. The writer of a thesis is, among other things, proving that they can conduct research, are capable of critical thought and can see the work in relation to the work of others. If the thesis is the product of team-based research, the writer of the thesis must produce a statement clearly identifying the nature and extent of collaboration involved in producing the thesis. The expectation is that the amount of work presented in the thesis should reflect a piece of independent research appropriate to the discipline completed over 9 to 12 months.

2.2 In assessing a thesis it is not necessary for an examiner to summarise the thesis. Analytical comment is requested of the examiner to be based on:

- 2.2.1 The ability of the candidate to demonstrate an awareness and understanding of literature relevant to the topic and the capacity to make considered judgements.
- 2.2.2 The extent to which the thesis embodies the results of an original investigation.

2.3 No hard and fast criteria are laid down to assess how the thesis has met the points outlined in 2.2 due to the range of discipline specific expectations. A satisfactory MPhil thesis may form the basis for an article in recognised refereed research journals, however this will not always be the case. It would be helpful if the examiner would offer an opinion on the publishable content of the thesis.

2.4 The expectation that a thesis displays new perspectives and/or advanced knowledge of research principles might be reflected in a number of ways. For example, a candidate might have studied an important problem from a new direction or have developed new approaches to investigating existing

¹ At UNSW, one semester amounts to between 4 and 5 months.

problems.

2.5 There are no strict requirements for the length of a MPhil thesis, although normally the text will not exceed 30,000 words. The expectation is that the amount of work presented in the thesis should reflect a piece of original research appropriate to the discipline completed over approximately 12 months. An unduly prolix thesis could be deemed unsatisfactory in terms of the quality of expression.

2.6 Examiners are requested to indicate the degree of seriousness that they would attach to corrections which are often identified as "editorial". Although it is not necessary, a list of minor corrections (typographical errors, spelling etc) is helpful to the candidate and greatly appreciated, and may be provided by the examiner.

3 FURTHER EXAMINATION

3.1 The University considers that the purpose of a further examination (which might include an oral examination) is to:-

3.1.1 Examine the depth of a candidate's understanding in respect of any particular area of the thesis;

3.1.2 Clarify interpretations placed on experimental results; and

3.1.3 Test a candidate's general knowledge in areas relating to the specific work.

Should the examiner require clarification on any of the points (3.1.1), (3.1.2), or (3.1.3), they are requested to provide where relevant a clear indication of the type and extent of remedial action expected of the candidate. If sufficient evidence is available in the thesis to satisfy the examiner on points (3.1.1) and (3.1.3) and that no points require clarification (3.1.2), the examiner is asked to recommend that no further examination be held.

4 EXAMINER'S REPORT - GUIDELINES

4.1 Each examiner is told of the names of the other examiners at the time the thesis is sent for examination. Each examiner, though at liberty to consult with other examiners, should submit an independent report. It is University Policy to release to a candidate the report of each examiner identified by name (if release of identity is agreed by the examiner) when the Higher Degree Committee has considered the reports and reached a decision.

4.2 It is not necessary for examiners to summarise the thesis. The detailed report should concentrate on how well the candidate has satisfied the criteria. Where revision and/or corrections are recommended, the instructions included in the report should be clear and precise so that the candidate, the candidate's supervisor(s)², the Head of School³ or the Higher Degree Committee⁴ readily understand what aspects of the thesis are being proposed for revision.

4.3 Following the examination of the thesis the examiner may recommend one of the following on the attached pro forma. The *guidelines* for each of the recommendations are given below.

A. The thesis merits the award of the degree.

This recommendation is appropriate if the thesis contains no faults that are apparent to the examiner. It is also appropriate where errors and omissions of an editorial nature are minor and, if left uncorrected, will not alter the conclusion that "the thesis merits the award of the degree". The examiner may, however, draw the candidate's attention to these errors and omissions in the detailed report.

B. The thesis merits the award of the degree subject to minor corrections as listed being made to the satisfaction of the Head of School.

The errors and omissions, which extend beyond those of an editorial nature, must be corrected if the thesis is to merit the award of the degree. The corrections are minor in that they do not change the structure or the conclusions of the relevant chapters of the thesis.

² **Supervisor and Co-supervisors:** These are the academics who are responsible, throughout candidature, for advising the candidate on the direction of the work embodied in the thesis. They would be expected, individually or collectively, to be highly competent in the field of the thesis and able to understand all recommendations made in the report of the examiner.

³ **Head of School:** This is the academic leader of the unit in which the main part of the work of the thesis is undertaken. The Head of School usually delegates authority on issues of postgraduate candidature to a senior member of the staff who will establish that recommendations of examiners have been addressed appropriately prior to recommending, to the Higher Degree Committee, that the degree be awarded.

⁴ **Higher Degree Committee:** This Faculty committee decides on candidature recommendations made by the Schools of the Faculty. It oversees responses to examiners' recommendations for further work and checks that the School has been satisfied in cases where minor corrections are recommended.

C. The thesis requires further work on matters detailed in my report. Should performance in this further work be to the satisfaction of the Higher Degree Committee, the thesis would merit the award of the degree.

The further work required should be sufficiently straightforward such that the examiner is happy to delegate approval of the revised thesis to the Higher Degree Committee. Examples of further work in this category could include: discussion and consideration of published work that is relevant to the conclusions of the thesis; consideration of alternative hypotheses that should reasonably be suggested by the candidate; presentation of additional experimental data that could be expected to be in the possession of the candidate; clearer specification of how the presented results/conclusions were arrived at. It is not normal University practice to conduct an oral examination. In exceptional cases an oral examination may be recommended if, for example, the examiner seriously doubts the adequacy of the candidate's understanding in a particular area of the thesis.

D. The thesis does not merit the award of the degree in its present form and further work as described in my report is required. The revised thesis should be subject to re-examination.

The further work involves a major revision of the thesis on the same topic. The examiner is assumed to be satisfied with the candidate's capability and demonstrated competence for this further work. The comments and suggestions in the detailed report should be clear and helpful to the candidate. As the thesis is to be revised along the lines suggested by the examiners, it would normally be re-examined by the same examiners. Examples of further work in this category could include: further analyses or experiments where the scientific method as presented in the thesis has significant flaws; performance of additional experiments that are deemed vital to the conclusions drawn in the thesis.

E. The thesis does not merit the award of the degree and does not demonstrate sufficient ability by the candidate for a resubmitted thesis to achieve this merit.

The examiner should provide the basis of this recommendation in the detailed report.