



Faculty of Built Environment

Notes for Examiners:  
Doctor of Philosophy  
(Practice-based PhD)

The guidelines described here should be read in conjunction with UNSW's "Notes for Examiners for Doctor of Philosophy Theses". They have been informed by the guidelines developed by the Faculty of Art & Design and the Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, UNSW Sydney.

## 1. PRACTICE-BASED DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In the same way as a traditional PhD, the primary aim of the Practice-based PhD is to contribute new knowledge to the field through systematic investigation. A candidate has the opportunity to apply the research value of the knowledge, skills and methodologies developed as a practitioner within a broader framework of critical enquiry and analysis. It is expected that the candidate will generate a new body of ideas-based/creative work (the Project) and a written work (the Dissertation) that together will make an original contribution to knowledge within the field.

A Practice-based PhD is available across all disciplines represented in the Faculty of Built Environment: Architecture, City Planning, Computational Design, Construction Management and Property, Industrial Design, Interior Architecture and Landscape Architecture. The Project component of the Thesis may therefore take one of a number of different forms, for example: architectural design, urban design and planning, construction methods and technologies, industrial design, interior design and landscape design. It could also cross a number of disciplines. The chosen medium can also vary, for example it might take the form of objects, drawings, plans, prototypes, models, creative text, digital fabrication, film, virtual reality or a combination of these. The requirement, however, is that the Project component of the Thesis can be fully documented in electronic form for the purposes of examination.

The Dissertation is a substantial research-based academic essay that bears a direct relationship to the Project. Together the Dissertation and the Project comprise the Thesis, and therefore should not be marked independently of each other. The possible relationships between the two components of the Thesis are explained below.

### 1.2 THE PROJECT

1.2.1 The body of work that comprises the Project should demonstrate vision, originality and a professional standard of technique and realisation.

- 1.2.2 The Project should clearly identify and test the research question/s of the Thesis.
- 1.2.3 While the Project may reflect upon the established practice of the candidate, it must comprise substantially a new body of work that responds to and articulates the theoretical position of the Thesis.
- 1.2.4 Depending on the form and nature of the Project, examiners may consider the following in its assessment:
- the extent to which it contributes to, reworks or advances productively a theoretical position or form of practice within the field;
  - the extent to which it engages effectively with theoretical concepts and thematic concerns;
  - the extent to which it represents a new area of practice, offers new and significant insights into an existing practice or opens up an area of practice to new interpretations or methods;
  - the extent to which it has developed new practices or techniques for representing ideas.
- 1.2.5 It is expected that the Project should satisfy a professional standard of presentation. “Professional standard” is taken here to mean a high level of competence in, and mastery over, the elements and techniques employed; and the capacity to make considered representational decisions within the relevant presentational mode. The work would be expected to display a level of complexity, depth, innovation and originality that lends itself to sustained and productive analysis. The Dissertation should serve to contextualise that analysis.
- 1.2.6 The body of work produced for the Project must have been completed during the candidate’s PhD program. While assistance may have been obtained and acknowledged in the fabrication and visualisation of the work, the candidate must be its sole author.

### 1.3 THE DISSERTATION

- 1.3.1 The same scholarly standards as regards to research, argument and presentation of findings in a traditional PhD dissertation apply to the Dissertation component of the Practice-based PhD Thesis. While the Dissertation in isolation need not make the same level of contribution to knowledge and original thought expected of a traditional PhD dissertation, the Dissertation and Project together should achieve this.
- 1.3.2 The expected length of the Dissertation is not less than 40,000 and not more than 50,000 words.
- 1.3.3 As with traditional academic theses, the Dissertation in its submitted form is not expected to be immediately publishable. However, it would be helpful if examiners could offer an opinion on the publishable content of the Thesis as a whole or in part.

## 1.4 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PROJECT AND DISSERTATION

- 1.4.1 All universities work with a different understanding of the relationship between the two parts of a Practice-based Thesis. In this instance, the Dissertation should not comprise solely a documentation of the Project. Likewise the Project should not simply illustrate the written component. Each in its own way should provide an original response to the research question/s posed by the Thesis, and together constitute an original and valuable contribution to knowledge within the field.
- 1.4.2 For a traditional thesis, the university requests that examiners comment upon the “ability of the candidate to demonstrate an awareness and understanding of literature relevant to the topic and the capacity to make considered judgements.” In a similar fashion, examiners of a Practice-based Thesis should be satisfied that the candidate under examination has demonstrated the ability to understand his or her own practice in the context of a broader and recognised field of study.
- 1.4.3 The Project and the Dissertation should be read as complementary in the ways suggested above; and be accorded an equal weighting in the examiner’s assessment of the overall standard of the combined PhD Thesis.

## 2. EXAMINATION PROCEDURE AND EXAMINER’S REPORT

- 2.1 The candidate is required to submit both the Dissertation and the Project as one submission. It is expected that the Project component will be documented in such a way that a full and complete representation of that work is available to examiners electronically as part of the one Thesis. This is particularly for the benefit of those international and interstate examiners who are physically unable to view any work that might be exhibited. Accordingly, it is the submitted (two-part) Thesis that is assessed, not a separate exhibition of the Project in addition to a written Dissertation.
- 2.2 The Examiner is expected to provide the Graduate Research School with an examiner’s report within eight weeks of receipt of the complete thesis.
- 2.3 Each examiner is told the names of the other examiners at the time the thesis is sent for examination, however each examiner should submit an independent report.
- 2.4 Examiners are not expected to summarise the Thesis. Their detailed report should concentrate on how well the candidate has satisfied the criteria. When 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, the Head of School or the Built Environment Higher Degree Committee readily understand what aspects of the Thesis are being proposed for revision.

2.4.1 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 provided on the form.

- A: The Thesis merits the award of the degree.
- 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.
- C: The Thesis requires further work on matters detailed in my report. Should performance in this further work be to the satisfaction of the Faculty Higher Degree Committee, the Thesis would merit the award of the degree.
- 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 submission is to be subject to re-examination.
- 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.