Principles for Doctoral Coursework Programs

As approved by Academic Board on 3 August 2001 (Resolution Number 234/01)

Preamble
There is a trend, in Australia and overseas, to develop doctoral programs with a significant coursework component in contrast to more traditional wholly research-based doctorates. Many Australian universities now offer doctoral programs that are described generically as "professional doctorates" or research plus coursework programs. These contrast with the Doctor of Philosophy program which, in Australia, is usually completed entirely by research thesis. Most of the new doctoral programs include a weighting of at least two-thirds research thesis which accords with the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) definition of a doctorate by research. However, some have lesser proportions of research and when the research component is less than two-thirds the course no longer qualifies as a research degree, as defined by DEST, and therefore attracts fees.

Curtin currently offers the following doctoral degrees:

**Higher Doctoral Degrees**
- Doctor of Science
- Doctor of Letters

**Research Doctoral Degrees with 100% Research Component**
- Doctor of Philosophy

**Research Doctoral Degrees with Some Required Coursework**
- Doctor of Education
- Doctor of Business Administration
- Doctor of Mathematics Education
- Doctor of Science Education
- Doctor of Public Health
- Doctor of Creative Arts (Art)
- Doctor of Creative Arts (Communication and Cultural Studies)
- Doctor of Creative Arts (Cultural Heritage Studies)
- Doctor of Creative Arts (Design)

All of the degrees with coursework are professionally orientated but meet the DEST guidelines for funding of higher degree by research programs, that is, the research component is at least two-thirds of the total course weighting.

There is now interest within some Schools at Curtin in developing courses with less than two-thirds research and a stronger orientation towards professional practice; in other words, candidates in these doctoral programs are able to apply their research and study to problems and issues in a professional context. Regulations would need to be developed should Curtin decide to offer doctoral degrees with less than two-thirds research.

In September, 2000 a joint meeting of the University Graduate Studies and the University Teaching and Learning Committees canvassed some of the issues relating to the development of doctorates with less than two-thirds research. A working party of Dr Susan Jordan, Dr Barney Glover and Professor Léonie Rennie agreed to develop a revised discussion paper to further the debate. Based particularly on the outcomes of the joint meeting, a paper prepared by the Council of Australian Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies, and a web search of doctoral degrees at other Australian Universities, a discussion paper, “Principles for Professional Doctorates”, was prepared and circulated to members of the two committees for comment. This paper was revised according to feedback and with reference to the postgraduate section of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Advisory Board’s Discussion Paper (November, 2000). The revised discussion paper, “Principles for Doctoral Coursework Programs at Curtin University of Technology”, was circulated widely in March. The present paper has been prepared from feedback to that draft and from discussions with members of the Professoriate and other staff with particular interest in the developments. This paper suggests guidelines and regulations would need to be developed should these guidelines be accepted.

**Nomenclature**
There are several ways to name doctoral degrees. The term “professional doctorate” has been used to refer to programs that require a coursework component; however, there are different amounts of coursework. Programs with at least two-thirds research are covered by the current regulations for doctoral programs. If Curtin develops programs with less than two-thirds research, new regulations will be required. We will distinguish between these two types of degrees in the way most convenient to develop a regulatory framework. The working title “doctoral research degrees” will be used to refer to doctoral degrees with at least two-thirds research and which are regarded as research degrees for DEST funding. Curtin’s PhD and the doctoral degrees with coursework listed...
above are included in this category and are covered by current regulations. The working title “doctoral coursework
degrees” will be used to refer to doctoral degrees with less than two-thirds research and are not regarded as
research degrees by DEST. These degrees will attract fees. The remainder of this document refers to doctoral
coursework degrees and provides principles for the development of these programs.

It is expected that the naming of a doctoral coursework degree shall be specific to an area of study, or discipline,
and linked to a professional field. No doctoral coursework program shall use the same name as a doctoral research
program existing at Curtin University of Technology.

Expectations of Learning Outcomes from a Doctoral Degree Program
The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Advisory Board has a discussion paper suggesting the following
guidelines:

*Characteristics of learning outcomes at this level include a substantive original contribution to knowledge, based on
a comprehensive and searching review of the literature, experimentation, creative work with exegesis or other
systematic approach; or based on advanced critical reflection on professional theory and practice. A graduate of a
Doctoral Degree program is able to:

- carry out an original research project, or a project (or projects) addressing a matter of substance
  concerning practice in a profession at a high level of originality and quality; and
- present a substantial and well-ordered thesis or portfolio, for submission to external examination against
  international standards. (AQF Discussion Paper, November, 2000 p. 37)*

These guidelines are met by Curtin’s currently offered doctoral degrees and all new doctoral degrees must also
meet them. Consequently, proposals for doctoral coursework degrees must present a tightly structured program
with elements linked theoretically, conceptually, and practically.

Structure of Doctoral Coursework Programs
The intended outcome of the doctoral coursework program is a graduate who can demonstrate advanced critical
reflection on professional theory and practice.

Proposed programs will include a balance of theoretical coursework, advanced professional practice and research
that allows critical reflection on theory and practice. A notional allocation of one-third to each component could be a
useful starting point, but it is recognised that in some disciplines, a different balance between theory and practice
may be more appropriate. Further, feedback to previous discussion papers indicates that less than one-third
research would be unacceptable to most respondents, consequently, a minimum of one-third research is a
suggested principle. The remaining up-to-two-thirds is flexible, to be divided between periods of advanced
professional practice with associated and integrated professional theory.

Entry Requirements
The doctoral coursework degree should have entry requirements similar to other doctoral degrees. It is expected
that Schools would add to the following minimum guidelines to address specific requirements for proposed
degrees.

1. Applicants should normally hold a good honours degree or Masters degree and be able to show a history of
   professional experience in the relevant area.
2. Applicants may be considered, on a case-by-case basis, if they hold a first degree with good results in a
   relevant field and also have at least six years’ professional experience, or three years at a level that enables full
   membership of a relevant professional body. In the latter case the professional body must have an
   accreditation/registration process.

Programs
1. Doctoral coursework programs should normally be of three years full-time duration or the equivalent part-time.
   (A minimum period of two years and a maximum of four years for a full-time candidate and a minimum of three
   years and a maximum of eight years for a part-time candidate could be stated.)
2. Doctoral coursework programs should include a minimum of one year full-time (or equivalent part-time) of
   research.
3. The coursework component should comprise units at an advanced postgraduate level and be sequenced to
   ensure an appropriate depth of knowledge, understanding, analysis and skills in the field of intended research.
   At least one-third of the coursework component of doctoral coursework programs should comprise units at the
   700 (doctoral) level.
4. In programs where candidates are not normally required to have had substantial professional experience
   and/or be currently employed in their profession, it is expected that the program should involve substantial
   professional practice. This may incorporate professional placements and workplace-focused research
   activities.
5. Prior to commencement of their research component, candidates must have completed sufficient research
   training to undertake the research competently and ethically.
6. Teaching and supervision should be undertaken wherever possible by persons with continuing professional or research experience in the candidate's field.

7. Candidates can receive advanced standing for up to one-third of their program on the basis of prior successful academic study at master's or doctoral level. For such advanced standing to be granted, candidates must demonstrate to the satisfaction of their Faculty Graduate Studies Committee that their prior studies make an essential contribution to their overall doctoral program.

8. Candidates who have completed, or transferred from other programs related to the doctoral coursework degree will have advanced standing considered on a case-by-case basis. Normally, it would be expected that a minimum of eighteen months full-time equivalent study would be required to complete the degree.

Examination
The successful doctoral coursework candidate should be adjudged, through external examination against international standards, to have made an original and significant contribution to knowledge and practice in a professional context. In order to assess this contribution, examination should be based on both the coursework and thesis components. In particular:

1. Candidates should be required to complete all components of the doctoral coursework degree at pass or higher level.

2. Candidates should be required to produce a portfolio of work undertaken. The portfolio should include all assessed work submitted for the doctoral level units within the coursework component and may include, at the discretion of the candidate, assessed work from other advanced postgraduate units in the program. As well, the portfolio should include a thesis presenting the outcomes from the research component.

3. The doctoral coursework candidate should demonstrate through the portfolio, together with any other coursework assessment, that they have, in relation to their field:
   - high level practical knowledge and skills
   - a critical understanding of relevant literature, theories, methodologies and/or major debates in the field of study
   - exemplary presentation and communication skills
   - well-developed and effective work practices and collaborative skills
   - a high level of research skills, ethics and practices.

4. The portfolio should be examined by three appropriately qualified and experienced people, at least two of whom should be external to the University.

5. Examiners should be fully informed of the nature of the doctoral program concerned.

6. Examiners should be issued with detailed guidelines for the examination process, including the criteria listed in point 2 above.

7. The examination process should be carried out in a manner consistent with current Higher Degree by Research Regulations for Doctoral Degrees. It is envisaged that examiners may be chosen for their specific professional expertise in addition to active researchers from academic or research institutions.

8. Oral examinations may be given in accordance with the current Higher Degree by Research Regulations for Doctoral Degrees.

Accreditation and Management
1. Doctoral coursework programs should be considered for accreditation by the Courses Committee, following approval by the Faculty Graduate Studies Committee and the University Graduate Studies Committee.

2. Enrolment in doctoral coursework programs should be managed by the Faculty Graduate Studies Committee in a manner consistent with procedures for enrolment and admission into Higher Degree by Research programs. At admission, students must provide a one-page overview of the structure of their program, including an outline of the coursework and practical components and a statement of the likely research area.

3. Each candidate in a doctoral coursework program should have a Program Committee comprising a Chairperson, Interim Supervisor and one or more Associate or Co-supervisors. Persons with specific professional or industrial expertise may be appointed as Associate or Co-supervisors as is necessary to support the candidate's overall program. The Program Committee should be appointed at admission of the candidate and the Thesis Supervisor should be finalised at the time of candidacy as noted below.

4. Doctoral coursework programs should include a candidacy process in which the candidate must present a proposal for consideration by the Faculty Graduate Studies Committee within three months of commencement of the research component of the program. The proposal should include an overview of the structure of the portfolio that will be submitted for assessment.

5. Annual progress reports should be required throughout enrolment.

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