



# EXAMINATION OF DISSERTATIONS AND THESES POLICY

**Policy Code: D13**  
**Version: 3**  
**Approved by: COUNCIL**  
**Approval Date: 05/04/2019**  
**Decision Number: COU19/2019**

<b>Date Reviewed</b>	<b>Version History</b>
2014/10/23	V1
19/01/2018	V1
06/08/2018	V1 (a)
11/10/2018	V2
05/04/2019	V3

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## 1 Introduction

The Da Vinci Institute is an accredited private higher distance education provider offering qualifications on NQF levels five to ten, which are registered on the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF). This policy forms part of the institutional Integrated Quality Management System and details the principles for ensuring that programme offerings adhere to academic standards and empower students to contribute to the transformation of their communities, society and the economy of the future. This approach is underpinned by the Business-driven Action Learning discourse on the co-creation and distribution of relevant knowledge.

This policy serves to inform examiners, students and supervisors of The Da Vinci Institute's approach to the examination of dissertations and theses. The Institute promotes the view that the student's final research report should represent a contribution to the field of study (an original contribution in the case of the doctorate), innovation, transformation of the self, the community, industry and society at large.

## 2 Definitions

Term	Definition
Researcher	Any systematic examination aimed at the development of, or contribution to knowledge that can be generalised. Activities complying with these requirements are regarded as research, regardless of whether they are normally described as development, demonstration, or tuition or by another term
Assessment	Is a process during which evidence of performance is gathered and evaluated against a specified set of criteria. The assessment of student learning is understood to mean the practice of designing formal and informal tasks for students to complete, and reaching conclusions and estimating the worth of their performances on these tasks. Assessment can also be understood to be a form of research that aims to find out what students know, understand and are able to do
Compliance	Conforming to a rule, such as specified in the policies, standards, regulations or law. Regulatory compliance describes the goal that the institution aspire to achieve in their efforts to ensure that personnel are aware of, and take steps to comply with the relevant laws and regulations

## 3 Legislative Compliance

This policy is benchmarked against, and should be read in the context of the relevant legislation underpinning the principles against which institutional policies and

operational procedures are developed, implemented and maintained. These include:

- i. Constitution of the Republic of South Africa: 1996
- ii. Higher Education Act (Act 101 of 1997)
- iii. CHE: Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) Criteria for Programme Accreditation: November, 2004
- iv. SAQA: National Policy and Criteria for Designing and Implementing Assessment for NQF Qualifications and Part Qualifications and Professional Designations in South Africa.

### **Da Vinci Policies, Guidelines and Regulations**

All the relevant teaching and learning policies of the institution as per the Quality Management System including:

- i. Policy: Nomination and Appointment of Examiners
- ii. Policy: Students-Supervisor Relationships
- iii. Policy: Conducting Ethical Research
- iv. Policy: Da Vinci Research Policy Framework
- v. Assessment Form and Narrative report – Dissertation
- vi. Assessment Form and Narrative report – Thesis.

## **4 Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to guide the examiner in the use of:

- 4.1 Assessment criteria and the report that should be completed when examining a dissertation/thesis
- 4.2 Appropriate standards and processes to meet quality and academic integrity requirements.

## **5 Characteristics of the Da Vinci Institute as a Higher Education Institution**

The Da Vinci Institute, which embraces the Mode 2 principles for knowledge production, expects its postgraduate students to address a research problem in the context of the self, the community, industry and society at large. Applying Mode 2 problem-solving methodologies provides for a close interaction of various systems, resources and people during a reflexive process of knowledge creation. Thus, within this context, research should have a unique purpose, noticeable application and outcome and a positive impact on the community, be it locally, nationally and/or internationally.

Learning and research at Da Vinci should demonstrate the adherence to the following principles:

- 5.1 **Knowledge generation in the context of application.** New knowledge is generated within the context of inconsistencies, imbalances or gaps identified in a real-life context. Contributions to knowledge should, therefore, be applicable to the self, enterprise or community and society
- 5.2 Research is undertaken through a **trans-disciplinary** approach which is evident when epistemologies integrate and move beyond discipline-specific approaches to define problems and identify unique solutions. Knowledge is generated across disciplinary boundaries and research is conducted with openness and flexibility
- 5.3 In terms of the concept of co-creation, **heterogeneity**, is embraced. This means that research takes place over a wide range of areas and actively seeks innovative, design and methodology. Research designs are viewed from different angles to find a solution to the issue at hand
- 5.4 Research outcomes also display **reflexivity and social accountability**. Students and supervisors recognise the impact and implications of the research problem within the self, the organisation and the broader community. The need for research on the problem, the goal and the outcome involves social accountability and articulating the appropriate return on investment
- 5.5 **Quality control** is evident in the research through substantial assurance of practice and usefulness. Research should show validity and credibility and demonstrate evidence-based application, contribution towards the self, the industry, society and ecosystem.

## 6 Assessment

### 6.1 Examination of Dissertations

Each dissertation is examined by two external examiners appointed by the Dean: Teaching and Learning. The non-examining chair will be the relevant postgraduate programme Coordinator or the Dean of Teaching and Learning or the Dean of Research or the Executive Dean or an appropriate nominee of the Dean of Research.

Examiners are appointed independently of each other and their names may not be disclosed to each other during the examination process. Normally, all examiners must be in possession of a doctorate. However, in special circumstances, someone with a relevant master's degree coupled with other relevant advanced experience may be appointed.

Students may not know the names of their examiners until after they have completed the degree, and subject to the examiners' consent.

### 6.2 Examination of Theses

Three external examiners are appointed for examination of a thesis and one may be an international examiner. The non-examining chair will be the relevant postgraduate

Programme Coordinator or the Dean of Teaching and Learning or the Dean of Research or the Executive Dean or an appropriate nominee of the Dean of Research.

Examiners are appointed independently of each other and their names may not be disclosed to each other during the examination process. All examiners of Doctoral theses must be in possession of a doctoral degree and relevant experience in post-graduate supervision, examination and research publication. In exceptional cases, where specialist professional or technical expertise in the field is required, an additional person may be appointed as an examiner and this must be fully motivated for and approved by the Examinations and Assessment Committee.

Students may not know the names of their examiners until after they have completed the degree, and subject to the examiners' consent.

### **6.3 Examiners' Report for dissertations**

The Assessment criteria and requirements which may include a copy of the National Qualifications Framework Level 9 Descriptors as well as the Exit Level Outcomes, are distributed to the examiners together with the dissertation to be examined. Dissertations should comply with The Institute's academic integrity requirements in terms of the Plagiarism (RG03) and Ethical Clearance policies (RS09).

The Assessment requirements provide guidelines for the completion of the examiners' report which should be sufficiently comprehensive so as to guide the student and the Supervisor, should there be a need to revise the dissertation.

For a Master's degree, the student should demonstrate that s/he has mastered advanced thinking, can critically engage with relevant literature and select appropriate research design and methods to collect data, make sense thereof and apply the findings on local and/or national levels. This includes an appropriate literature review of the existing field of Business Leadership and Business Management as is relevant to the study and meeting the NQF level 9 descriptors and assessment criteria.

The general outcomes to be assessed in the dissertation are:

- 6.3.1 Undertake independent research
- 6.3.2 Demonstrate a competent knowledge of research methodology
- 6.3.3 Produce a research dissertation and complete coursework according to stipulated institutional requirements
- 6.3.4 Create strategies to address organisational challenges through the integrated application of theoretical knowledge, practical knowledge and skills, systemic principles, and advanced analytical and problem solving skills
- 6.3.5 Conceptualise and integrate managerial leadership frameworks within a systems thinking context

- 6.3.6 Integrate the knowledge and required behaviours relevant to the effective management of technology, the management of innovation and the management of people processes with transformative initiatives
- 6.3.7 Interpret and communicate ideas, principles, concepts and practical application of theories and frameworks
- 6.3.8 Align and integrate technology, innovation, people and systems thinking concepts to transform individuals, communities and/or organisations.

#### **6.4 Examiners' Report for theses**

The Assessment requirements which may include a copy of the National Qualifications Framework Level 10 Descriptors as well as the Exit Level Outcomes, are distributed to the examiners together with the thesis to be examined. The theses must comply with The Institute's academic integrity requirements in terms of the Plagiarism (RG03) and Conducting Ethical Research (RS09) policies.

The Assessment requirements provide guidelines for the completion of the examiners' report, which should be sufficiently comprehensive so as to guide the student and the Supervisor, should there be a need to revise the theses.

For a Doctorate degree, the student should demonstrate that s/he has mastered advanced thinking, can critically engage with relevant literature and select appropriate research design and methods to collect data, make sense thereof and apply the findings on local and/or national levels. This includes an appropriate literature review of the existing field of Business Leadership and Business Management as is relevant to the study and meeting the NQF level 10 descriptors and assessment criteria.

The general outcomes to be assessed in the thesis are:

- 6.4.1 The student demonstrates knowledge of, and the ability to create and introduce, where appropriate, and to evaluate, select and apply relevant research designs, approaches, methodologies, instruments, and procedures, appropriate for the doctoral work undertaken
- 6.4.2 The student demonstrates ability to conceptualize and reflect critically, work independently, and arrive at defensible conclusions and solutions, based on appropriately-substantiated and defensible premises and analysis
- 6.4.3 The student demonstrates an advanced level of communicative competence, through capacity for extended, sustained and rigorous academic writing, including relevant digital literacy skills appropriate for doctoral research, and ability to relate individual research with reference to, and critical analysis of, associated research produced by scholars in the relevant intellectual and knowledge domain(s)
- 6.4.5 The student is able, as appropriate to the field of research, to communicate research findings effectively to expert and non-expert audiences alike, to

defend them in the context of intellectual contestation, and to disseminate them in appropriate forms

- 6.4.6 The student demonstrates ability to conduct research-related critical and analytical thinking, which shows an intellectual competence for problem-solving in diverse contexts, both familiar and unfamiliar
- 6.4.7 The student has acquired well-informed relevant knowledge in the selected field or discipline. Through an original contribution achieved through independent study, the student integrates new with existing knowledge, thereby advancing the frontiers of knowledge. In addition to being well-informed about and well-versed in the literature in a chosen field, the student is able to make a contribution to the relevant evolving debates in the field. The work must be of a quality to satisfy peer review and merit publication. More specifically, at the time of submission of the thesis, evidence must be provided of having published or submitted an article for publication to an accredited journal
- 6.4.8 The student demonstrates expert, specialised, and in-depth current knowledge of a specific area of research, which will be evident in the thesis or equivalent
- 6.4.9 The student demonstrates awareness of how the specific area of research relates, or is relatable, to other fields of study and practice which will be evident in the doctoral work
- 6.4.10 The student demonstrates awareness of, and compliance with, the principles of ethics in research and, where relevant, professional protocols, which will be evident in the in-depth discussion in the thesis or equivalent
- 6.4.11 The student shows evidence of original and innovative thinking in research and, where applicable, creative practice and/or performance, which makes a special and novel contribution to the field of study.

## **6.5 Oral Examination of dissertations**

After successful completion of the dissertation examination and effecting of the required changes if applicable, the student is required to participate in an oral examination, which is referred to as the 'dissertation defence,' consisting of a presentation by the candidate of the research undertaken and responding to questions from the panel. The Supervisor and student may invite additional panel members from the field or the student's workplace. The panel may include the relevant non-examining Chair, one of the examiners (in person or via an online medium) and a minimum of two additional academics or alumni at the relevant qualification level. Additional feedback may be provided to improve the quality and contents of the dissertation.

The Examiners' reports and total scores given by the academic members of the panel are taken into consideration during deliberations on the decision of whether the



student passes the oral examination. The oral assessment accounts for 10% of the dissertation (module) mark.

### **6.6 Oral Examination of theses**

After successful completion of the thesis examination and effecting of the required changes if applicable, the student is required to participate in an oral examination, which is commonly referred to as the 'thesis defence,' consisting of a presentation by the candidate of the research undertaken and responding to questions from the panel. The Supervisor and student may invite additional panel members from the field or workplace. The panel may include the relevant non-examining Chair, one of the examiners (in person or via an online medium) and a minimum of two additional academics or alumni at the relevant qualification level. Additional feedback may be provided to improve the quality and contents of the thesis.

Since the thesis does not have a mark allocation, the purpose of the thesis defence is thus not to allocate a mark, but to address a key assessment criteria at NQF 10, which speaks to the ability of the student to professionally orally communicate the research journey. The thesis defence may also serve as an opportunity for the panel to confirm that the study was undertaken independently by the student and thus constitutes his/her personal work. The panel member's feedback may be used to revise the thesis.

### **6.7 Additional Aspects of the Dissertation**

Before finalisation of the dissertation, the Supervisor must confirm that all required changes have been made, as per Examiners' feedback. Although the title must be well formulated prior to examination, it may be possible that the examiners recommend a title change. The final title must be approved by the Research Committee and recommended to the Examination and Assessment committee.

### **6.8 Additional Aspects of the Thesis**

Before finalisation of the dissertation, the Supervisor must confirm that all required changes have been made, as per Examiners' feedback. Although the title must be well formulated prior to examination, it may be possible that the examiners recommend a title change. The final title must be approved by the Research Committee and recommended to the Examination and Assessment committee.

## **7 Review of this Policy**

Regular review and amendment of this policy will be done in line with the approved institutional policies and regulatory requirements. This will take place in consultation with the relevant quality assurance structures at departmental and institutional level, under the auspices of the official custodian of this policy, namely the Executive Dean.

## Appendix A

### Assessment requirements for dissertations

The student is required to submit his/her dissertation via the Learning Management System (MOODLE). The programme convener is required to manage and monitor the submission for compliance. The programme convener needs to include a Turnitin Report with a Similarity Index of no more than 10% in the examination pack submitted to the examiner.

In terms of the overall assessment of the dissertation, one of the following recommendations should be considered:

- a. Pass without revision (mark equivalent range 75%+)
- b. Pass after minor revision (mark equivalent range 60-74%)
- c. Major revision and resubmission for examination (mark equivalent range 50-60%)
- d. Fail: resubmission and re-examination (mark equivalent range <50%)
- e. Fail: Not eligible for resubmission (based on examiner's recommendation)

Should there be a discrepancy in final assessment of more than 10% between the examiners, the non-examining chair may request a sitting of the Examination and Assessment committee for purposes of determining the final mark. If the discrepancy exceeds 10%, a Moderator may be appointed (RS05 – Policy: Appointment of Research Supervisors). The Moderator will be provided with a copy of the dissertation together with the examiners' reports. The mark awarded by the Moderator will be accepted as the final mark. Upon passing, a student will be permitted to proceed with oral examination.

Should the student dispute the outcome of the examinations, an Appeals process will be followed in line with the Appeals policy and Assessment policy.