

AQF specification for the Doctoral Degree

This *Specification* informs the design and accreditation of Doctoral Degree qualifications.

The principal users of the *AQF Qualification Type Specifications* are the accrediting authorities in each education and training sector which are responsible for the accreditation of AQF qualifications and the developers of AQF qualifications in each education and training sector.

The other users of the *Specifications* are the authorised issuing organisations, industry and professional bodies, licensing and regulatory bodies, students, graduates and employers.

The purpose of the Doctoral Degree is to qualify individuals who apply a substantial body of knowledge to research, investigate and develop new knowledge, in one or more fields of investigation, scholarship or professional practice.

Doctoral Degree qualifications are located at level 10 of the Australian Qualifications Framework.

There are two forms of Doctoral Degree with the same descriptor within the Doctoral Degree qualification type: the Doctoral Degree (Research) and the Doctoral Degree (Professional).

Research is the defining characteristic of all Doctoral Degree qualifications. The research Doctoral Degree (typically referred to as a Doctor of Philosophy) makes a significant and original contribution to knowledge; the professional Doctoral Degree (typically titled Doctor of [field of study]) makes a significant and original contribution to knowledge in the context of professional practice. The emphasis in the learning outcomes and research may differ between the different forms of Doctoral Degree qualifications but all graduates will demonstrate knowledge, skills and the application of the knowledge and skills at AQF level 10.

Doctoral Degree qualifications must be designed and accredited to enable graduates to demonstrate the learning outcomes specified in the level 10 criteria and the Doctoral Degree.

AQF level 10 criteria	
Summary	Graduates at this level will have systematic and critical understanding of a complex field of learning and specialised research skills for the advancement of learning and/or for professional practice
Knowledge	Graduates at this level will have systemic and critical understanding of a substantial and complex body of knowledge at the frontier of a discipline or area of professional practice
Skills	Graduates at this level will have expert, specialised cognitive, technical and research skills in a discipline area to independently and systematically: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• engage in critical reflection, synthesis and evaluation• develop, adapt and implement research methodologies to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice• disseminate and promote new insights to peers and the community• generate original knowledge and understanding to make a substantial contribution to a discipline or area of professional practice
Application of knowledge and skills	Graduates at this level will apply knowledge and skills to demonstrate autonomy, authoritative judgement, adaptability and responsibility as an expert and leading practitioner or scholar

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Doctoral Degree qualification type descriptor	
Purpose	The Doctoral Degree qualifies individuals who apply a substantial body of knowledge to research, investigate and develop new knowledge, in one or more fields of investigation, scholarship or professional practice
Knowledge	Graduates of a Doctoral Degree will have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a substantial body of knowledge at the frontier of a field of work or learning, including knowledge that constitutes an original contribution • substantial knowledge of research principles and methods applicable to the field of work or learning
Skills	Graduates of a Doctoral Degree will have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cognitive skills to demonstrate expert understanding of theoretical knowledge and to reflect critically on that theory and practice • cognitive skills and use of intellectual independence to think critically, evaluate existing knowledge and ideas, undertake systematic investigation and reflect on theory and practice to generate original knowledge • expert technical and creative skills applicable to the field of work or learning • communication skills to explain and critique theoretical propositions, methodologies and conclusions • communication skills to present cogently a complex investigation of originality or original research for external examination against international standards and to communicate results to peers and the community • expert skills to design, implement, analyse, theorise and communicate research that makes a significant and original contribution to knowledge and/or professional practice
Application of knowledge and skills	Graduates of a Doctoral Degree will demonstrate the application of knowledge and skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • with intellectual independence • with initiative and creativity in new situations and/or for further learning • with full responsibility and accountability for personal outputs • to plan and execute original research • with the ongoing capacity to generate new knowledge, including in the context of professional practice
Volume of learning	The volume of learning of a Doctoral Degree is typically 3 – 4 years

An additional kind of Doctoral Degree, the Higher Doctorate, may be awarded by an issuing organisation on the basis of an internationally recognised original contribution to knowledge rather than through the process of supervised independent study.

Qualification nomenclature

The title used for Doctoral Degree qualifications must be consistent with the *AQF Qualifications Issuance Policy*.

Pathways

Each qualification accredited as a Doctoral Degree will include documented pathways consistent with the *AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy*.

Issuing organisations offering a Doctoral Degree qualification must meet the requirements of the *AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy*.

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Responsibility for accreditation and development

Accrediting authorities and those developing qualifications for accreditation must adhere to the AQF specification for this qualification type⁴ and any government accreditation standards for higher education when accrediting a Doctoral Degree qualification.

Accrediting authorities are responsible for monitoring the quality of issuing organisations against any government regulatory and quality assurance arrangements.

When accrediting Doctoral Degree qualifications accrediting authorities must ensure that:

- Graduates of a Doctoral Degree qualification will achieve learning outcomes at level 10.
- All the learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and the application of knowledge and skills) of the Doctoral Degree qualification type are evident in each qualification accredited as this type. Some may have more emphasis than others in different Doctoral Degree qualifications depending on their purpose.
- Research is the defining characteristic of the Doctoral Degree qualification.
- The Doctoral Degree (Research) qualification (leading to the award of a Doctor of Philosophy) is designed so that graduates will have undertaken a program of independent supervised study that produces significant and original research outcomes culminating in a thesis, dissertation, exegesis or equivalent for independent examination by at least two external expert examiners of international standing.

Research in the program of learning will be for at least two years and typically two-thirds or more of the qualification. The program of learning may also include advanced coursework to enhance the student's capacity to make a significant contribution to knowledge in the discipline (or cross-disciplinary field). The advanced coursework may support but not replace the research outcomes.

- The Doctoral Degree (Professional) qualification is designed so that graduates will have undertaken a program of structured learning and independent supervised study that produces significant and original research outcomes culminating in a thesis, dissertation, exegesis or equivalent for independent examination by at least two external expert examiners of international standing.

Research in the program of learning will be typically for at least two years of the qualification. The program of structured learning typically will include advanced coursework designed to enhance the student's capacity to make a significant contribution to original knowledge in the discipline (or cross-disciplinary field) and/or research-integrated practice developed in collaboration with a relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body. The advanced coursework and research-integrated practice will support the research outcomes.

- Generic learning outcomes are explicitly identified in the qualification and align with the level of the qualification type, the purpose of the qualification and the discipline. Generic learning outcomes fall into four broad categories: fundamental skills; people skills; thinking skills; and personal skills. In the higher education sector they are generally known as graduate attributes and are defined by each higher education provider.
- The relationship between the learning outcomes in the level 10 criteria, the qualification type descriptor, and the discipline is clear.

⁴ Guidance provided by the Council of Australian Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies (DDoGS) should be considered when accrediting a Doctoral Degree qualification. www.ddogs.edu.au

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- The design of the components of the qualification will provide coherent learning outcomes for the level and qualification type and will enable graduates to demonstrate them.
- The volume of learning is sufficient for graduates to achieve the learning outcomes for a qualification of this level and type.

Once a qualification is accredited it must be placed on the AQF Register in a form consistent with the *AQF Qualifications Register Policy*.

Authority to issue the qualification

A Doctoral Degree qualification may only be issued by an organisation that is authorised by an accrediting authority to do so, and meets any government standards for the sector.

Assessment leading to the award of the qualification lies with the issuing organisation. The issuing organisation is responsible for ensuring the quality of the learning outcomes and that the graduate has satisfactorily completed any requirements for the awarding of the qualification.

Issuing organisations must issue qualifications consistent with the *AQF Qualifications Issuance Policy*.

Issuing organisations will maintain a register of the AQF qualifications they have issued consistent with the *AQF Qualifications Register Policy*.



**Australian Qualifications
Framework Council**

www.aqf.edu.au