Academic Approvers (e.g., Head of Programmes, Head of Departments – What you need to know when approving research proposals

Academic approvers have responsibility for checking thesis candidates meet the academic admission criteria for the programme. This is typically a Programme Director or Head of Department. You reach the Academic online approval step after you have been sent an email with a link to Academic approval. At this point, the Primary Supervisor has already approved the following:

- ☑ Student has appropriate academic and research preparation to undertake a thesis
- ☑ Suitability of research proposal
- ☑ Compliance check information
- ☑ All required documents have been uploaded and reviewed
- ☑ Scholarship application assessment completed if applicable
- ☑ Recommendation notes are correct
- ☑ Agreement to supervise student

Your role is now to make a (in most cases, final – unless there is a variation which needs further approval, see below) approval decision on whether the applicant has the academic requirements and support, to enter the Programme.

On the Academic approval screen, you will see the name of the Primary Supervisor who approved, the date approved, and any comments that they made for you to consider/check. You will also see details of any changes that have already been required as part of the approval chain. These should have already been dealt with before the proposal recommendation was resubmitted, but you should check.

Below this, there is a dropdown box to indicate whether you wish to make a case for a variation of the academic admission requirements – see explanation of the third checkbox, for further detail on this.

Next, there is a dropdown box to select whether you approve, followed by three checkboxes and a Comments field. If you select in the dropdown box that you Approve, you will need to select all three checkboxes, to indicate your approval of (i) the supervision, (ii) the research proposal and (iii) the academic admission requirements. Explained below for each checkbox approval is:

- <u>what</u> you are approving
- what you need to <u>check</u>
- <u>where to look</u> for the information.

<u>Suitability of supervision</u>

> **What you are approving**. That the supervision panel meets academic requirements.

> **Check (for all applicants):**

> > - **Academic staff** – that the correct staff have been entered. Primary supervisors for PhD applicants must normally have a PhD themselves, or be a well established researcher. Primary supervisors for all other research degrees, must have the same or higher level of qualification than the degree they are supervising.

> **Check (for PhD applicants only):**

> > - **Academic staff** – that the primary supervisor has supervised at least one Doctoral student to submission (click on the Workload link to the right of the supervisor's name and scroll to the bottom of the screen that appears, to check). It is okay if the primary supervisor has not

previously supervised a PhD, as long as a colleague who has supervised a PhD to completion (again, check the workload link), is taking at least 33% of the supervision weighting percentage, and will be providing mentoring support. Note that sometimes eVision may show that a supervisor has not supervised a PhD to completion, because they have not done so at Otago, whereas they may have done so at a previous university – in this case look for an approval comment from the Primary Supervisor that explains this, and if there is none, check with them.

- **Departmental Advisory Committee –** If there is only one supervising academic staff member, then they must be supported by an advisory committee of at least two members, although the committee does not have to be identified at this point (but must be, by the first progress report at six months, and Student Administration will check this when processing the progress report). If there is more than one supervising academic staff member, then an advisory committee is optional.
- **Paper code –** for the majority of cases, this is a sense check that the four letter paper code looks appropriate to the discipline (e.g. a candidate with primary supervision in the Dunedin School of Medicine – Psychological Medicine, might have a paper code PSME – Psychological Medicine. However, there are two codes which should only be used in specific circumstances, as they have significant funding implications – these are the MICN and DENT codes. If one of those codes appears, check Appendix A to see that the choice of these codes is justified.

Where to look. Click on the Supporting information tab and expand the Supervisory arrangements section.

Research proposal has been considered through appropriate channels

What you are approving. That the usual academic unit process for considering research student applications has been followed.

Check:

- that the usual process has been followed. In this context, proposal usually means not just the thesis proposal itself, but the whole application/all key supporting documents. Processes vary by academic unit: sometimes the supervisor only checks the application, while in others the proposal may go through a committee, e.g., Research Advisory, Postgraduate. The key is to ensure that standard academic unit-level procedures for research proposal approval for the degree involved have been followed.

Where to look. The primary supervisor approver may have entered Comments indicating this, but you may need to check with the relevant committee or academic unit records to ensure that standard procedures were followed.

Student meets regulations and academic requirements for thesis study, or a case for a 'variation' has been made

What you are approving. That the applicant has the necessary academic, **including grade requirements**, and other background to be admitted to the programme, in accordance with the programme regulations. If the applicant does not meet the academic admission requirements, but you still wish the applicant to be considered for further approval, you will need to make a case for a 'variation', see below.

Check (for non-PhD thesis applicants):

- that the relevant programme regulations in the University Calendar, in particular the admission criteria, have been met.

Check (for PhD applicants):

- that the correct **Candidate eligibility pathway** has been entered, and that it is satisfied. Specifically, it is important you are sure (unless the pathway is 'Appropriate research experience', or you wish to make a case for a 'variation') of the following:
- that the applicant
  - meets the Otago equivalent of B+ for the advanced level papers in their qualifying degree
  - meets the Otago equivalent of B+ for their dissertation/thesis component.
  - has completed a dissertation/thesis comprising 0.25 of more of a full time year's work – either through number of credits shown on transcript, or through a written assessment of equivalence to an Otago Honours dissertation or Master's thesis.

  Note that the primary supervisor should have already confirmed this, so check with them. If still unsure, email the candidate's transcript to scholarship.gpa@otago.ac.nz for an assessment

- that where Candidate eligibility is 'appropriate research experience', there is evidence of designing, conducting and communicating research under supervision e.g. in a research lab, or workplace.
- **Additional papers**. Although PhD applicants can technically take up to 60 points of additional papers, these are taken relatively infrequently – so check that the papers indicated here seem appropriate and that reasonable justification is given. Additional papers typically include research methods or statistics papers or language papers, required by the academic unit to give an applicant a grounding in a particular area. If entered, Student Administration will request more detail via a Change of Research Details form.
- **English language waiver**. If this is requested, there must be good reasons given – www.otago.ac.nz/graduate-research/prospective-students/otago718304.html details what the Graduate Research Committee need to see. If more information is needed do not approve, but either check with, or send back to the primary supervisor, by choosing *Changes required*, and entering *Comments*.

Where to look

- non-PhD – check the University Calendar programme regulations
- PhD - click on the Supporting information tab, expand the PhD section; and review the Candidate eligibility, Additional papers, and English language waiver information shown.

Academic approval

Case for a 'variation'. In some circumstances an applicant does not meet the academic admission requirements for the programme, but you still wish the applicant to be considered for further approval – for example, the applicant was close to the minimum grade for programme admission, and there were extenuating circumstances as to why they did not achieve the grade. In such a situation, you need to make a case for a 'variation', by selecting Yes in the dropdown box, and then adding comments in the field that appears, to support the case. For a Master's applicant, a variation case will be escalated to the relevant Associate Dean Postgraduate for consideration; for a PhD applicant, the case will be escalated to the Dean or Manager of the Graduate Research School.

Do you agree to approve? According to your decisions regarding the three checks (supervision, research proposal, academic requirements) above, either:

- Select all three checkboxes and choose *I agree to all* in the dropdown box, enter any Comments you have (see below), and click the green *Approve* button; or
- Select only those checkboxes you agree with, choose *I only agree with the following* in the dropdown box, enter Comments that clearly explain to the primary supervisor/other approvers why you are not agreeing with the particular checks that you are not agreeing with, and click the red *Changes required* button.

Comments: If you are unsure about any aspect of the application, make a comment here for Student Administration to check, and escalate to the Associate Dean Postgraduate/Graduate Research School if necessary. You must enter comments, if you are not approving and sending back to the primary supervisor via the *Changes required* button.

Help Resources

eVision Online Approval Training Modules

- Research Proposal Approval – Primary Supervisor: https://smssupportdesk.otago.ac.nz/ESD/UltimateEditorInclude/UserFiles/evision/graduate_research/proposal_approval/

- Research Proposal Approval - My Department Dashboard: https://smssupportdesk.otago.ac.nz/ESD/UltimateEditorInclude/UserFiles/evision/graduate_research/my_department_students_dashboard/

FAQs on Online Approval:

https://otago.custhelp.com/app/answers/list/kw/Research%20Proposal%20Approval/

Appendix A. Criteria for Assessing Enrolments in MICN and DENT PhD Thesis Codes

There are two criteria for assessing whether or not a student should be enrolled in a Medicine (MICN) PhD thesis code. If one or both of these criteria are not met, students must be enrolled in a HASC9 or other appropriate thesis code.

1. The student holds an MB ChB or equivalent.

"Equivalent" in this context means as a minimum a qualification that would allow someone to register and practice as a medical doctor either in New Zealand, or in their home country.

2. The thesis topic is one that could only reasonably be studied by a medically qualified candidate.

Guidelines for establishing whether a student meets this criterion include the following:

- *The thesis topic has a strong focus on clinical outcomes, or is obviously applicable to clinical matters;*
- *At least one of the student's supervisors is medically qualified.*

The criteria for assessing enrolments in Dentistry (DENT) PhD thesis codes is essentially the same, but with "BDS" and "dentally qualified" substituted for the equivalent terms above.

All enrolments in MICN and DENT PhD thesis codes must be approved by the Dean of the appropriate School or Faculty.