Guide to Supporting Document Requirements
for thesis proposal assessment and approval

Part A - Introduction:

Scope: This guide covers document requirements for all Otago research degrees containing a thesis component of 90 points or more; this includes PhDs, Professional Doctorates, Masters and Honours. It focuses on document requirements for *thesis proposal* approval. Where admission occurs separate from proposal approval (e.g. 'Papers + thesis' programmes like the DClinDent), it will not include all admission document requirements. However, where research proposal approval and programme admission coincide (e.g. thesis-only programmes like the PhD), the requirements listed below are inclusive.

Purpose: This guide aims to provide direction about *which* documents are required as well as *what* those documents should contain. It can be used by staff involved in the approval process who, as part of their approval task, are required to check that all required documents have been provided and are appropriate, and/or by those writing support letters (to enhance the persuasiveness of their letters).

Document access: Staff needing to confirm the required documents have been provided and are appropriate, can view the documents directly from their online Approval page (by clicking on the Supporting information tab) or by going through Proposal Assessment and clicking on the Documents tab. See Part C below for 'tips' on finding the relevant documents.

Checklist: A quick checklist of the document requirements is available here.

Part B – Document Requirements

1. ALL Research Degrees
PhD, Professional Doctorates, Masters, and Honours with a thesis component

1.1 Common documents required for all research students

- A **Thesis Proposal** which meets the department's standard.

- **Transcript(s)** for previous study at other institutions relevant to the application. Transcripts should provide detail of how the student meets the regulations for thesis enrolment. Students with prior study at Otago do not need to upload their record as this will be already be visible from the online Approval page (via *View Otago academic record* in the Supporting information tab).

- A **CV** which should include a timeline of education, employment and if applicable, a list of published journal articles, conference papers/attendance, summer studentships and other supporting research activities.

2. Masters with a scholarship application

2.1 Students with a scholarship application:

- A **Department Support Letter** is not mandatory but is 'recommended' and may improve the student's likelihood of success; see 4 below for detail on content and process.

3. PhD Requirements

3.1 All PhD students also require:

- A **Department Support Letter** from the primary supervising department in which the student seeks to conduct their PhD research – see 4 below for detail on content and process.

- **References** from academics/researchers/professionals who are supporting the student's application - see 4below for detail on number, type, content, and process.

3.2 Additional document requirements for specific PhD contexts:

In addition to the documents listed in 1.1 and 3.1 above:

For PhD students whose qualifying degree has an ungraded thesis/dissertation

- A statement provided by the department outlining the size, scope and quality of the ungraded work, whether it is equivalent to an Otago Master's or Honours dissertation and the Otago grade it would likely receive. If the student is applying for a scholarship, an assessment undertaken by an academic independent to the supervisory team may carry greater weight.

For international PhD students whose first language is not English

- Where the student's first language is not English there is either an English language proficiency result uploaded or the department have made a case for waiver (click here for more information for doctoral students).

4. Document content and information

4.1 Department Support Letter – Content and Process

The primary department (either the primary supervisor, HoD, or other department academic) need to prepare a detailed letter of support for the student (this must be a full and separate letter, not just commentary noted on another form or document). This is required for all PhD students, regardless of category or context.

Content. Commentary in the letter should cover:

- How you have evaluated the student's suitability for admission. Please include comments about any experience you have of working with them
- Their academic record
- Their research ability
- Any key points raised by a referee (if relevant), including comment on any negative points raised by referees
- The strategic fit to your department's research programme
- If the student is not meeting the criteria for admission, supporting information about why they should be admitted

Process. Department support letters should be uploaded by the department (by the Primary Supervisor or Client Services Administrator) into eVision > Graduate research > Proposal assessment and search > Documents tab > Upload a document - use the document type Application – Department support letter.

In addition to the Department Support Letter:

Student with qualifying degree from University of Otago;
- None unless student is changing departments, in which case:
    o 1 x Reference from previous supervisor

Student with qualifying degree from another NZ University:
- 1 x External Reference

Student with qualifying degree from an overseas university and no scholarship application :
- 1 x External Reference

Student with qualifying degree from an overseas University and a scholarship application
- 2 x External References

The student should supply supervisors with the names and contact details of referees. Either the supervisor or a Client Services Administrator should contact the referee.

It is recommended a standard set of questions be provided to the referee to guide them and ensure a 'personalised' reference is provided. Such questions could include:

- In what capacity, and for how long have you known the student?
- Can you comment on the student's postgraduate coursework?
- Can you comment on the student's research ability?
- Can you comment on the student's communication skills?
- Can you comment on the student's ability to work with you as a supervisor, and as part of a team (if required)?
- What is the student's rank in their cohort?
- What is the student's rank in your supervision or examining experience?
- Is there anything else we should know about this student as we consider them for our programme?

External references should be uploaded into eVision > Graduate research > Proposal assessment and search > Documents tab > Upload a document - use the document type Application – External reference

Part C – Tips for finding documents in Online Approval

Primary tip: **You may have to open multiple documents to find what you are looking for.**

Documents are classified by category and document type (described below) to facilitate easy identification. Unfortunately, however, these classifications are not always used correctly by the students/agents using them, so you may have to check several documents to find the one you want. It is 'good practice' to check all documents to ensure that you have viewed the most current and relevant documents provided.

1. Access

All approvers, regardless of approval role, can view the documents uploaded into the system directly from their approval page. This is done by clicking on the Supporting Information tab, then opening the Document section by clicking the + button.

Research proposal approval

Name: Hermione Armstrong Granger
(Hermione A)
ID: 5683641

Programme: Doctor of Philosophy
Stage: Proposal approval

Primary supervision: School of Arts - History

Approval	Supporting information

Supporting information

Expand all

+ Documents

+ Supervisory arrangements

+ Compliance

+ PhD

+ International assessment

+ Scholarship

Within the Documents section, documents are categorised by 'sub-section' and 'document type' to help identify their content and purpose. This section also shows who uploaded the documnt (staff or student) and when it was uploaded.

1. Document Sub-Sections (See example below.)

- **Qualification documents** – This is where academic transcripts (and ECE reports) are usually found; each transcript should be attached to a particular qualification listed in the students application.
- **Application documents** – These are documents uploaded by the student with their application; this is where you'll usually find the CV and thesis proposal (and other supporting admission documents submitted by the student). Scholarship applications and related supporting documents (e.g. awards, references, etc) can also be found here.

- **Research documents** – This section is for documents relating specifically to Research Student Management; it includes department support letters, references, thesis proposals, department assessments, etc; it includes documents relevant to current applications as well as any previous research programmes studied at Otago. Documents in this section may have been uploaded by the student, the department (academic staff or Client Services Administrator), Student Administration, or GRS.
- **Student documents** – This is primarily for University Admission documents but is also sometimes used by staff to upload transcripts and other admission documents when other sub-sections are unavailable (typically occurs with international students using the 'Admission Method Verification' document type).

2. Document type and description

Documents are presented according to their 'document type' (e.g. thesis proposal, transcript, curriculum vitae, etc). Document types are selected from a drop down list and attached to the file when it is first uploaded into eVision. Free text 'descriptions' are also added at the time of upload, and these appear in parentheses following the document type. (See example above.) The type and description first entered by the student/agent/etc at the time of upload remain in the system and appear in the Supporting Information tab as originally entered, unaltered by staff.

These descriptors help identify the documents you need to review … but they are not always as accurate or helpful as they could be. Sometimes the wrong document type is used; sometimes a generic category is used for everything (e.g. 'Supporting documentation' for transcript, CV, essay, and IELTS); sometimes the free text description is repetitive, contradictory, ambiguous, and/or misleading; in short, a wide range of configurations, both helpful and unhelpful, are possible.

It is important to remember, therefore, when searching for documents not to rely entirely on the type or description provided, and that you may need to open documents to confirm their contents.

3. Multiple copies/files

Multiple versions of seemingly similar documents are not uncommon. Sometimes students/agents upload multiple copies of the exact same document; or upload one document in multiple files (e.g. each page as a separate file); or upload several 'updated' versions of a document (e.g. a CV or Proposal); or upload the same document for different purposes and use different document types.

Again, there's a wide range of outcomes possible and no way of ensuring that students/agents will use the upload functionality correctly. Equally, there is no magic answer for sorting through difficult document lists (other than opening the documents to see what they are). One helpful tip is to use the **upload date** to identify which document is the most recent version (e.g in the case of multiple CV's) and/or to identify clusters of documents that were uploaded together. Otherwise, just knowing what the issues are does help expedite the filtering process.

> ➢ *When in doubt … open the document to see what it is.*