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## Compliance to Thesis Examination Procedure in the ISO Quality Management System for Teaching and Learning

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### Abstract

Quality management system (QMS) for teaching and learning has been developed for the purpose of quality assurance and therefore must be updated and upgraded regularly. For the management of graduate studies, thesis examination procedure is a core process in the assessment of students and has remained as one of the quality objectives in the recently merged QMS. The study compares the compliance to this procedure from three clusters, namely Science and Technology, Social Sciences, and Medical and Health Sciences. The research methods are document review and focus group discussions. Through focus group discussions, analysis is done on changes in the management and their impacts on the QMS for teaching and learning for graduate studies. Findings show that there are variations in the management of thesis examinations for all clusters. Some factors are identified at different levels of the management of thesis examination such as procedures, thesis examination process, the number of PhD candidates, the frequency of senate meetings and other external factors. These findings are useful input for corrective and preventive actions to improve the QMS for teaching and learning at graduate level, especially the procedure on thesis examination.

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*Keywords:* quality management system; teaching and learning; thesis examination;

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### 1. Introduction

Quality management system (QMS) for teaching and learning has been developed for the purpose of quality assurance and therefore must be updated and upgraded regularly. For the management of graduate studies, thesis examination procedure is a core process in the assessment of students and has remained as one of the quality objectives in the recently merged QMS. The 13th objective reads as “To ensure that thesis is examined in three months starting from the date it was sent to the examiner.” The minutes of the annual Management Review

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Meetings show the consistent failure of most of centres to achieve this objective. This failure has been verified by internal and external audit reports for the years 2009 and 2010 under the merged QMS. The study is crucial to identify the factors for this failure and seek the different and best practices for the compliance to this procedure based on the sample for focus group discussions.

## 2. Methodology

For data collection, this research is using documents and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) from three clusters that are Science and Technology, Social Sciences, and Medical and Health Sciences (Refer Table 1). Key informants in the FGD consists of the Deputy Dean, Head of Quality Assurance, Chairperson, Head of Department, Coordinator, Deputy Registrar, Clerks in charge of graduate programs and also from the Faculty or Centres, and Internal Examiners.

Data related to the management of thesis examination, including letter for the appointment of thesis examiner, statistics for the timeframe of thesis examination and the flow chart of the procedure of how thesis examination is being managed is obtained from each cluster. Analysis is carried out regarding the normal procedure available in the Quality Manual and improvements that has been carried out by each cluster in managing thesis examination. Several techniques of managing thesis examination has been suggested for various level of thesis examination such as the management aspect, procedure for thesis examination, total number of thesis to be examined, frequency of Senate meetings or other factors that are beyond our control. This research discusses one case from each cluster. Hopefully results from the research can be another input for improvement of the QMS, and more importantly, to comply with the thesis examination procedure (Objective 13) in the QMS ISO PPPS.

Table 1. Cluster and List of Faculties

CLUSTER	FACULTY
Science & Technology	Faculty of Science & Technology (FST) Faculty of Engineering & Built Environment (FKAB) Faculty of Science & Information Technology (FTSM)
Social Sciences	Faculty of Social Sciences & Humanities (FSSK) Faculty of Islamic Studies (FPI) Faculty of Economy & Business (FEP)
Medical & Health Sciences	Faculty of Pharmacy (FFAR) Faculty of Medicine (FPER) Faculty of Dentistry (FGG)

## 3. Data Analysis

In general, thesis examination procedure can be divided into three phases, namely nomination of the examiner process, thesis examination process and report/oral examination preparation.

### 3.1 Process of Nominating Examiner Candidates

There are several processes in nominating candidates for thesis examiner, following notice of thesis submission by students. These include nominating examiner candidate, preparing examiner candidate's curricular vitae, approving examiner candidate, and appoint examiner candidate. For each cluster under study, all of these processes consume a period within three months after thesis submission notice. Nevertheless there is a slight variation in terms of the management of the procedures. Table 2 displays information on the managerial procedure on examiner nomination based on clusters.

Table 2. Implementation of Nominating Candidates of Examiner across Faculty

Nomination Of Examiner Candidate Process	FACULTY					
	FST	FKAB	FTSM	FSSK	FPI	FEP
Nominating Candidate	HOD/ COC	Supervisor/ HOD	CPGS	Supervisor	HOD/ COC	FPGS
Preparing Candidate's CV	CPGS	Supervisor/ Student/ FPGS	FPGS	Supervisor	CPGC	FPGC
Approving Candidate	CPGC	FPGS/ AR	FPGC	CPGC	CPGC	FPGC

Note: HOD – Head of Department  
 COC – Chairman of Centre  
 CPGC – Centre Postgraduate Committee  
 FPGC – Faculty Postgraduate Committee  
 AR – Assistant Registrar  
 FPGS – Faculty Postgraduate Secretariat

### 3.2 Process of Thesis Examination

The QMS MGS has categorized the thesis examination process in a 3-month period as one of UKM Quality objectives. This process covers the confirmation of the examiner candidate's agreement, thesis delivery, sending of reminder notice (if necessary) and the receipt of examiner's report.

The consent from external and internal examiners to examine thesis is usually obtained during the preparation process of the examiner's personal data. Letters of appointment are sent along with the agreement confirmation letter and student's thesis. As for FEP, the confirmation letter is usually obtained within a period of 2 weeks. However, this is often delayed. At FPI, the confirmation letter is usually received within 2 months. In FTSM and FKAB, the confirmation letter is handed in along with the thesis report. As for FST, it is assumed that the examiners agree to examine thesis if no response is received from them. Table 3 compares various practices of sub-processes under Thesis Examination process across several faculties.

Table 3. Implementation Process of Thesis Examination across Faculty

Thesis Examination Process	FACULTY					
	FST	FKAB	FTSM	FSSK	FPI	FEP
Delivery of Appointment Letter, Copy of thesis, and Letter of Agreement	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sending of Reminder Notice External examiner	After 2 months	Very seldom	After 2 months	After 2 months	After 3 months	Within 2 months
Sending of Reminder Notice to Internal Examiner	After 2 months	Not Stated	After 2 months	After 2 month	Oral Reminder	Within 2 months
Reminder Mechanism	e-Mail	Letter, e-Mail, Phone Call	Letter, e-Mail, Phone Call	After 2 months	Letter, Phone Call	Letter. >3 months: Phone Call, e-Mail

Overall, all faculties send letters/notice to the external examiner reminding them to finish their review after 2 months, and prepare examination report within the prescribed 3 months. However, findings of the study showed that there were some variations in managing the thesis examination procedures. Such variations can be explained due to the dissimilarity in the thesis examination management across different faculties in terms of the appointment letter given to the examiners and flowcharts as depicted in Table 4. Table 4 and Table 5 indicate that the viva proposed dates as specified in the appointment letter do not necessarily affect the total number of theses examined as in the case for FPI and FKAB.

Table 4. Statement inclusion of Viva Date in Examiner’s Appointment Letter

Faculty	Viva Date Stated	Viva Date not Stated
FTSM		✓
FGG		✓
FPI	✓	
FEP	✓	
FFAR		✓
FKAB	✓	

Table 5. Duration of Examiner’s Report Receipt

2009/2010 Session					
FACULTY	3 MONTHS	%	> 3 MONTHS	%	TOTAL
FTSM	4	36.4	7	68.6	11
FGG	2	66.7	1	33.3	3
FPI	5	17.9	23	82.1	28
FEP	5	50.0	5	50.0	10
FFAR	2	66.7	1	33.3	3
FKAB	69	95.8	3	4.20	72

2010/2011 Session					
FACULTY	3 MONTHS	%	> 3 MONTHS	%	TOTAL
FTSM	6	85.7	1	14.3	7
FGG	4	100	N.A	N.A	4
FPI	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A
FEP	2	100	N.A	N.A	2
FFAR	5	100	N.A	N.A	5
FKAB	26	83.9	5	16.1	31

### 3.3 Process of Report Receipt

Since the thesis examination period by the examiner is 2 months, report from them is expected to be received within 3 months from the date of thesis submission. Nevertheless, there were some scenarios (special cases) where the thesis examination takes longer than 3 months. Table 5 lists some reasons for the occurrences.

Table 6. Special Case for Late Thesis Examination

Special Case	FST	FKAB	FTSM	FPI
Examiner pulled out	✓	-	-	✓
Examiner did not receive thesis	✓	✓	✓	-
Senate meeting rejected candidate	-	✓	✓	-
Delayed Appointment	-	✓	-	✓
Delay in receipt of report	-	✓	-	-

Figure 1 presents the percentage of students' theses examined in the period of 2 to 7 months at FKAB. From as many as 48 theses, 33.3% (16 theses) were completely examined more than 3 months after theses receipt date.

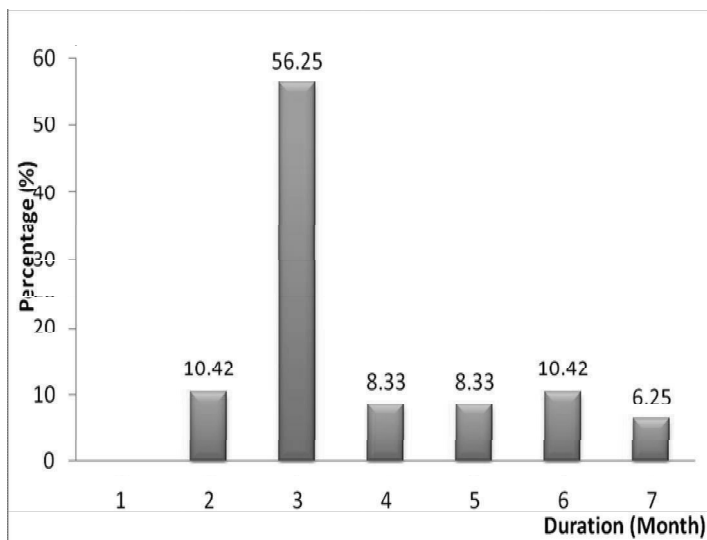


Figure 1 Evaluation Period from Thesis Receipt Date FKAB

#### 4. Research findings

Research assumptions that there are variations in the procedure for the management of thesis examination for all clusters have been verified but under control. The findings show that all clusters comply to the standard procedure of UKM/PPA/PPPS/P05/AK06 for thesis examination. However, this procedure has failed to achieve the 13<sup>th</sup> quality objective due to the delay in the submission of thesis examination reports despite the various means of reminders to examiners.

#### 5. Limitations and recommendations

Focus group discussions have involved 1-10 representatives from selected faculties in all clusters. However, there has not been equal participation. Besides, some information is vague, incomplete and irrelevant as they are not directly responsible for the management of thesis examination. This has affected the validity of analysis as the data is incomplete and not comprehensive. For recommendations, respondents suggested that the format of thesis examination report be made easier and friendly to examiners in order to achieve the 13<sup>th</sup> objective.

#### 6. Conclusion

This research concludes that MS ISO 9001: 2008 has been the framework for the quality management system for graduate programs but there are variations in the management of thesis examination. Therefore, some continual quality improvements are necessary to assure the effectiveness of the merging of the quality management system for both undergraduate and graduate programs so that the quality of UKM graduate studies can be improved in line with its status as self-accredited institution and research university (RU). Besides, every centre must share best practices in achieving the 13<sup>th</sup> Quality Objective for CQI. The search for best practices for CQI will be both inward and outward as the internal examiners can also share their experiences as external examiners for other higher institutions.

## 7. Acknowledgement

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