

# Higher Degrees by Research Confirmation of Candidature - Guidelines



/explore/policies-and-procedures/higher-degrees-by-research-confirmation-of-candidature-guidelines

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## Introduction

These Guidelines document school specific requirements that are in addition to the information provided in section 15 of the Higher Degree by Research Candidature – Procedures, to assist candidates, supervisors and independent reviewers.

The confirmation process involves the candidate

- Developing a research proposal
- Receiving initial feedback from an independent reviewer/s (usually at least one is external to USC)
- Incorporating the initial feedback into the final draft of the research proposal prior it being submitted to the confirmation panel (Principal Supervisor, Independent Reviewer/s and Head of School or their delegate)
- Final draft of research proposal is presented at a confirmation seminar which includes the confirmation panel and anyone in the university community who wishes to attend
- The confirmation panel assesses whether the student is confirmed, required to undertake revisions, should be downgraded or upgraded or show cause as to why their candidature should not be terminated.
- If revisions are required, the candidate undertakes the revisions and resubmits for the panel to undertake a final assessment and determine if the candidate should be confirmed in the HDR program.

Guidelines for: USC Business School, School of Creative Industries, School of Social Sciences and USC Law School

## DOCUMENTATION

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- Research Proposal
  - The research proposal normally is comprised of the first three chapters of the thesis, e.g. introduction, literature review, and methodology. USC Law School candidates requires the equivalent of three (3) chapters to be determined by the Principal Supervisor and the School HDR Coordinator.
  - The research proposal must be run through SafeAssign by the Principal Supervisor
- Most recent Plan and Progress Review (PPR)
- Additional documentation
- If the research proposal and the PPR do not include the following items, then additional documentation should be provided that includes
  - the title of the research, research question(s), research problem, significance and innovation of the research, relevant research literature, methodologies and methods to be used, expected outcomes, timelines, any anticipated variations from discipline specific Higher Degree by Research Thesis Presentation - Guidelines and ethics.

For the requirement of thesis with publication(s), the candidate must also include in the confirmation documentation an explanation of the number and type of publications (including proposed titles of publications, titles of journals or conferences, authors, impact factors, suggested abstracts, and potential dates of submission), and also the format of the thesis with publication(s).

If the candidate wishes to present their thesis in a different format than a traditional thesis, they must explain the proposed changes as part of their confirmation documentation.

## Creative Arts (additional Requirements)

Doctor of Creative Arts (DCA) and Master of Creative Arts (MCA) candidates should include the title of the research/creative product, research/creative concept, the nature and purpose of the creative arts product, significance and innovation of the research, relevant literature, methodologies and methods to be used, importance of the research, timelines and ethics. DCA and MCA candidates must also include a sample of the creative arts product.

## Confirmation Panel

The panel consists of the supervision panel, at least one independent assessor (usually at least one is external) and the Head of School or the Head of School delegate.

## Presentation

[usc.edu.au/policy](https://usc.edu.au/policy)

- Format: Formal academic seminar presentation open invitation to university and guests.
- Duration: 20-30 minutes plus 10-15 minutes discussion
- Timing: The presentation occurs after the independent reviewer has reviewed and provided feedback on the research proposal and the candidate has incorporated the feedback into the updated research plan and presentation.
- Quality expectations: Communicates with critical insight the research problem, methodological approach using academic verbal skills including appropriate responses to questions
- Assessment: The confirmation panel assesses the updated research plan and oral presentation.

## Independent Review

Independent reviewers are asked to provide feedback on the following in their report:

- General comments
- Originality
- Methods
- Critical thought
- Contribution to knowledge
- Edits and referencing
- Overall recommendation

## Roles and Responsibilities

The Candidate:

- Ensures all documentation is completed and submitted within the required timeframes.
- Books presentation time after consultation with their supervision panel.

The Supervisor:

- Ensures all documentation is completed and submitted with the required timeframes.
- Ensures an appropriate independent reviewer is nominated and is available at the time of the proposed seminar.
- Runs candidate's research proposal through SafeAssign.
- Distributes documents to panel and student at designated points during the confirmation process.
- Provides feedback to student.

Independent Reviewer:

- Reviews research proposal prior to presentation.
- Attends presentation and provides feedback on oral presentation and updated research proposal.
- Reviews revisions.

Head of School or Head of School Delegate:

- Approves the Independent Reviewers.
- Chair of the panel.
- Chairs the confirmation seminar.
- Collates and records panels decisions.
- Liaises with Graduate Research Studies Management Office for submission of confirmation outcome.

Graduate Research Office

- Organises seminar including advertising
- Invites Independent Reviewers
- Sends calendar invite to panel
- Upon receipt of Panel's decision, advises student of official outcome.

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## Guidelines for: School of Education, School of Health and Sport Sciences, School of Science and Engineering

### DOCUMENTATION

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- Research Proposal
- Most recent Plan and Progress Review
- Additional supporting documentation

The prime purpose of the confirmation document is to provide evidence that the candidate understands the significance of the proposed research project, research methodology or methods, and ethical aspects. The confirmation research proposal should be around 10,000 words depending on the discipline and methodology (min 3,000 and max 15,000 words). The proposal should provide the reviewers and panel with sufficient detail to make informed judgements about the planned research. If the candidate wishes to present their thesis in a

different format than a traditional thesis, they must explain the proposed changes as part of their confirmation documentation (i.e. in their updated Research Plan). The candidate must also include in the confirmation documentation an explanation of the number and type of publications (including proposed titles of publications, titles of journals or conferences, authors, impact factors, suggested abstracts, and potential dates of submission), and also the format of the thesis. Candidates discuss with their supervisors the most appropriate format for their research proposal.

## Proposal Requirements

Usually the Confirmation Document will include the following elements, however, this will be determined by the methodology and the project. (NB: not all sections are relevant in all projects):

- Title: clear and concise containing the keywords of the topic
- Introduction/Background and Literature Review
- Research problem and/or question
- Research Design, Proposed Methodology and methods
- Ethics
- Budget
- Timeline and Publication Plan
- Reference list

## Presentation

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- Timing: The presentation occurs after the independent reviewer has reviewed and provided feedback on the research proposal and the candidate has incorporated the feedback into the updated research plan and presentation.
- Quality expectations: Communicates with critical insight the research problem, methodological approach using academic verbal skills including appropriate responses to questions.
- Assessment: The confirmation panel assesses the oral presentation.

## Confirmation Panel

The panel consists of the supervision panel, three reviewers (one of which must be external to USC, plus one reserve reviewer) and the Head of School or the Head of School delegate.

## Independent Review

The independent reviewer of applications to progress to confirmed HDR candidature is asked to provide feedback both within the document and supported by a 1-2 page written report. The candidate should demonstrate:

- sufficient breadth and depth of the relevant literature
- how the project contributes to the existing body of knowledge
- a firm grasp of the overarching aims, methodology, methods and techniques and logistics to gain robust data (either empirical or qualitative or both) that will enable the project to be successful
- where appropriate, the ability to formulate testable hypotheses that are logically coherent
- sufficient knowledge about the techniques required to analyse the data
- that the progress and proposal (as described) is of quantity and quality suitable for a Master by Research/Doctoral confirmation

## Reviewer feedback

Independent reviewers of Applications to Progress to Confirmed HDR Candidature are asked to provide feedback on the following in their report (please see accompanying framework for further guidance):

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- General comments
- Originality (e.g. is the project novel and innovative, likely producing research outcomes that will be publishable?)
- Methods (e.g. is the project realistic, practicable and within the scope usually accepted appropriate for the program?)
- Ethical aspects (e.g. are all possible ethical issues appropriately identified and addressed?)
- Feasibility (e.g. And, Are the future milestones appropriate and consistent with the stated aims?)
- Timeframe (e.g. is there a likelihood of timely completion?)
- Critical thought (e.g. Does the work show adequate synthesis and critique of previous research and theory?)

- Contribution to knowledge (e.g. Are projected publication outputs reflective of scientific quality in terms of impact factor of journals or similar)?
- Edits and referencing
- Overall recommendation (including, if applicable, whether the candidate can be upgraded to a Doctoral degree or downgraded to a Master degree)

## Roles and Responsibilities

### The Candidate:

- Ensures all documentation is completed and submitted within the required timeframes.
- Books presentation time after consultation with their supervision panel.
- Has attended at least three other presentations prior to their own.

### The Supervisor:

- Ensures candidate is ready for confirmation process
- Ensures all documentation is completed and submitted with the required timeframes.
- Ensures an appropriate independent reviewer is nominated and is available at the time of the proposed seminar.
- Runs candidate's research proposal through SafeAssign.
- Distributes documents to panel and student at designated points during the confirmation process.
- Provides feedback to student.

### Independent Reviewer:

- Reviews research proposal prior to presentation.
- Attends presentation and provides feedback on oral presentation and updated research proposal.
- Reviews revisions.

### Head of School or Head of School Delegate:

- Approves the Independent Reviewers.
- Chair of the panel.
- Chairs the confirmation seminar.
- Collates and records panels decisions.
- Liaises with Graduate Research Studies Management Office for submission of confirmation outcome.

### Graduate Research Office

- Organises seminar including advertising
- Invites Independent Reviewers
- Sends calendar invite to panel
- Upon receipt of Panel's decision, advises student of official outcome.

## Guidelines for: School of Nursing, Midwifery and Paramedicine

### DOCUMENTS

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- Most recent Plan and Progress Review
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- Ethics
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- Reference list

## Presentation

- Format: Formal academic seminar presentation open invitation to university and guests.
- Duration: 20-30 minutes plus 10-15 minutes discussion
- Timing: Presentation is conducted after feedback from the reviewer(s) has been provided to the candidate and the candidate has had sufficient time to integrate the reviewers' feedback into the presentation.
- Quality expectations: Communicates with critical insight the research problem, methodological approach using academic verbal skills including appropriate responses to questions.
- Assessment: The confirmation panel assesses the oral presentation.

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