Higher Degree by Research Confirmation of Candidature- Guidelines

Introduction

These Guidelines document Faculty, School or discipline specific requirements that are in addition to the information provided in section 12 of the Higher Degree by Research Candidature – Procedures, to assist candidates, supervisors and independent reviewers.

1. Confirmation of Candidature Requirements

University Confirmation of Candidature requirements are described in section 12.2 – 12.5 of the Higher Degree by Research Candidature – Procedures. The following details Faculty, School or discipline requirements for the research proposal and the presentation.

Faculty of Arts and Business (all Schools and disciplines)

The confirmation document normally comprises of the first three chapters of the thesis, e.g. introduction, literature review, and methodology. Where the first three chapters do not include all of the elements specified in the Higher Degrees by Research Candidature – Procedures section 12.6; these must be provided separately to the thesis chapters with the application for progression to confirmed candidature.

The confirmation presentation is either 15 or 20 minutes in duration with a further 15 or 10 minutes of questions accordingly. The Presentation and Questions combined should not exceed 30 minutes.

Doctoral and Masters candidates (excluding Doctor and Master of Creative Arts, see below for specifications for these programs) should include 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 and ethics.

For the requirement of thesis by publication, 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 by publication.

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).

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.

School of Education

Research proposal

The confirmation research proposal should be between 3,000 and 6,000 words, with the latter being more appropriate for PhD candidates. The proposal should provide the reviewers with sufficient detail
to make informed judgements about the planned research. Candidates discuss with their supervisors the most appropriate format for their research proposal. It should include the following elements:

1.) **Title**: clear and concise containing the keywords of the topic
2.) **Background and Literature Review**: rationale for the research and how it can make a significant and original contribution to the field. The research should be located within a critical, analytical review of the relevant literature.
3.) **Research problem (e.g. aims questions and/or theoretical hypothesis)**: a concise statement of the research problem and the key research aims, question and/or theoretical hypothesis the candidate is going to test or address.
4.) **Research Design**: a concise account of the proposed methodology and research plan and how the research aims, questions and/or theoretical hypothesis are addressed. The research design should identify the intended participants, design and methods to be employed, research procedures, and data analysis, in a manner consistent with ethical guidelines.
5.) **Ethics**: describe, where applicable, any ethics approvals and any permits, licenses or other authorisations for the proposed research that are required by law. Attach documentary evidence of relevant approvals to the research proposal.
6.) **Budget**: include a statement detailing how the method/plan is going to be resourced and funded. The budget and resource statement should include equipment, travel or specialist services.
7.) **Timeline and Publication Plan**: a timeline illustrating how the candidate will complete the various aspects of their program including dissemination of their results through conference presentations and publications.
8.) **Reference list**: include a substantial reference list which is up-to-date and presented in a style identified as appropriate by the candidate’s supervisors (not included in word limit).

**Presentation requirements**

1.) **Format**: Formal academic seminar presentation, open invitation to university and guests.
2.) **Duration**: 15-20 minutes plus 5-10 minutes discussion
3.) **Timing**: After the submission of confirmation document and feedback has been provided from examiners for integration into the presentation
4.) **Quality expectations**: Communicates with critical insight the research problem, methodological approach using academic verbal skills including appropriate responses to questions.
5.) **Assessment**: The confirmation panel assesses the oral presentation.

School of Health and Sport Sciences

The prime purpose of the confirmation document is to provide evidence that the candidate understands of the significance of the proposed research project, research methodology or methods, and ethical aspects. The confirmation document should include the following elements:

1.) **Title** of the research (no more than 30 words)
2.) **Introduction or background to research**: reasons for the research, and scope of the project (max 1000 words)
3.) **Literature Review**: a review of the relevant literature on the topic, with particular emphasis on critical examinations of how proposed research project will add new knowledge to the study field; (excl. references no more than 6000 words).
4.) **Research problem (e.g. aim and objectives/questions and/or hypothesis)**: a concise statement of the research problem and the key research aims, questions and/or hypotheses to test or address (400-500 words)
5.) **Research design - Proposed Methodology and methods**: A concise account of how the research is to be carried out, including the theoretical framework for research design, strategy of
inquiring and individual study design. Research techniques including sampling, data collection methods (e.g. laboratory methods, field collection techniques or related activities as applicable), data analysis (e.g. statistical design, thematic analysis), and strategies to enhance research quality. If more than one study is conducted a study by study approach is recommended. All methods and numerical approaches must be explicitly linked to the stated hypotheses or research questions; (excl. references, max 2000 words).

6.) Research ethics: Provide evidence that research ethics matters have been dealt with or are being dealt with. Highlight expected ethical matters that may arise from the project and how they will be addressed (max 400 words).

7.) Outcomes expected of the research: describe the expected outcomes and where applicable the potential implications for practice and theory (max 500 words)

8.) Timeline, milestones and budget: a chart showing what is to be done at which stage of the candidature and how progress will be measured aligned with the timeline in the Research Plan (max. 1000 words). A budget including one page for cost and one page for justification (need/purpose) for each item. If anticipated costs exceed those allocated by the faculty then alternate funding sources must be identified.

9.) Outputs: identify how the research is to be published and/or disseminated, listing prospective titles of papers and target journals (including the Impact Factor, 500 words).

Presentation requirements
1.) Format: Formal academic seminar presentation, open invitation to university, guests and independent reviewer.
2.) Duration: 30 minutes plus 5-10 minutes discussion. This is followed by a 5-10 minute discussion by the confirmation panel on additional changes that may be required to the research proposal.
3.) Timing: After the submission of the written confirmation document and feedback has been provided from the independent reviewer which is addressed appropriately in the oral presentation.

School of Nursing and Midwifery

A research proposal of 10,000 – 15,000 words in which the following content is required:

1. Title
2. Introduction to the research area and significance of proposed research
3. Aim of the research, research question/s and or hypothesis
4. Justification of project based on relevant literature
5. Research Design - approach and methods
6. Ethical considerations
7. Timeline, budget and progress to date
8. Reference list

For the requirement of thesis by publication, 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 thesis by publication.

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.

Once the candidate has been given the opportunity to address any questions/recommendations made by the assessor(s) a confirmation presentation will be scheduled. At this presentation the candidate will present the revised proposal.

The confirmation of candidature presentation will be approximately 25 minutes followed by 15 to 20
School of Science and Engineering

The prime purpose of the confirmation document is to provide evidence of a candidate’s capabilities to undertake original academic research of high quality, and whether the candidate is likely to complete within the set period. It also provides evidence about the novelty of the research and whether it is practicable and will result in publication outputs. Thus, candidates are required to provide the following:

1.) Literature Review: a synopsis of the literature related to the topic, with particular emphasis on critical examinations of existing concepts or paradigms, and the identification of gaps in knowledge; max. 3000 words (excl. references).

2.) Hypotheses / Key Questions: a concise statement about the main questions to be answered or the hypotheses to be tested (candidates can either frame this section as predictive hypotheses or research questions); max. 500 words (excl. references).

3.) Proposed Methods: A concise account of how the research is to be carried out, including key aspects of laboratory methods, field collection techniques or related activities as applicable. This section must contain a detailed description of the statistical design and the numerical techniques to be used in the analysis of the data. All methods and numerical approaches must be explicitly linked to the stated hypotheses; max. 2000 words (excl. references).

4.) Timeline & Milestones: a detailed account of what has been achieved to date, and a chart showing what remains to be done during the remainder of candidature; this must include specific criteria of how progress will be measured; max. 1500 words (excl. references).

5.) Outputs: identify how the research is to be published / communicated, listing prospective titles of paper and target journals (inclusive their Impact Factor): 500 words (excl. references).

Candidates will make a 30 minute presentation on their proposed research to a faculty audience, with a further 15 minutes for questions.

2. Confirmation of Candidature Process

University Confirmation of Candidature processes are described in section 12.6 – 12.8 of the Higher Degree by Research Candidature – Procedures. The following details of local processes for Confirmation of Candidature.

Faculty of Arts and Business (all disciplines)

On Faculty receipt of the candidate’s confirmation document, the chair of the confirmation panel (usually the Associate Dean Research or delegate) forms a panel. The panel consists of the Supervisory team, Associate Dean Research (or nominee) and one to two independent reviewers (internal or external).

Panellists are given two weeks to review the confirmation document. The confirmation presentation consists of two parts:

In part one, the candidate gives a 15 or 20 minute presentation to staff and students with a further 15 or 10 minutes of questions accordingly. The presentation and questions combined should not exceed 30 minutes.

Part two is a closed section with only the panel and candidate in attendance. Panel members will have an opportunity to ask questions, and the candidate will have an opportunity to clarify any areas of concern regarding their submission.
The candidate leaves the room and the panel discusses and develops a recommendation for the outcome of the application for progression to confirmed candidature in accordance with the Higher Degrees by Research Candidature – Procedures section 12. Where applicable, the panel will also consider:

- The number and type of publications appropriate for a thesis by publication in the discipline and also the format of the thesis by publication; and
- Any potential change to the format of a traditional thesis appropriate for the discipline

The candidate joins the panel again to receive advice on the panel’s recommendation.

The panel’s decision is recorded on the Application for Progression to Confirmed Candidature form which is then sent to the Office of Research (together with the complete application for confirmed candidature documents and the written feedback from the panel including any required instructions for revisions and changes) for consideration by the Research Degrees Committee.

School of Education

Applications for progression to confirmed candidature are reviewed by a confirmation panel comprising of the Principal Supervisor, Co-Supervisors, the School of Education Portfolio Leader Postgraduate and HDR and at least one independent reviewer.

The process includes:

- An application for progression to confirmed candidature should be submitted by the due date to the Office of Research as described in section 12 of the Higher Degree by Research Candidature – Procedures.

- School of Education Portfolio Leader Postgraduate and HDR will seek suggestions from the Principal Supervisor for three possible independent researchers with the ability to provide feedback and comment on the research proposal. The School of Education Portfolio Leader Postgraduate and HDR will then select one or two independent researchers to provide feedback and comment on the proposal within two weeks. School of Education Portfolio Leader Postgraduate and HDR will discuss the feedback with the confirmation panel who will determine a recommendation for the outcome of the application for progression to confirmed candidature. The recommendation is forwarded back to the Office of Research for the Research Degrees Committee to consider. The Principal Supervisor may discuss the proposed feedback with the candidate including appropriate responses to the feedback, with advice that the final outcome is yet to be determined by the Research Degrees Committee, and will be communicated to the candidate by the Office of Research.

- If revisions to the application for progression to confirmed candidature are required, the candidate will make these revisions within the specified timeframe, and will submit their Revised Application for Progression to Confirmed Candidature to the Office of Research by the due date.

- The HDR confirmation of candidature presentation is scheduled. The presentation is chaired by the School of Education Portfolio Leader Postgraduate and HDR and includes the confirmation panel. The format for the presentation is detailed above.

- School of Education Portfolio Leader Postgraduate and HDR submits the assessment of the confirmation of candidature to the Office of Research for review by the Research Degrees Committee.

School of Health and Sport Sciences

Candidates go through the confirmation of candidature process within 6-12 months after enrolment.
Applications for progression to confirmed candidature are reviewed by a confirmation panel comprising of the Principal Supervisor, an independent academic staff member with knowledge in the field, the School Research Director/HDR Coordinator and at least one independent reviewer.

The process includes:

- An application for progression to confirmed candidature should be submitted by the due date to the Office of Research as described in section 12 of the Higher Degree by Research Candidature Procedures.

- The Principal Supervisor will nominate one possible independent reviewer with the ability to provide feedback and comment on the research proposal. The administrative support for HDR candidates in the School will then contact the reviewer to confirm availability and provide feedback and comment on the proposal within three weeks (or as agreed with the School Research Director/HDR Coordinator). The Principal Supervisor will be contacted for advice with regard to requests from reviewer’s for an extension of time to provide their feedback or if appropriate, the appointment of an alternative reviewer.

- The School Research Director/HDR Coordinator will discuss the feedback with the Principal Supervisor who will determine a recommendation for the outcome of the application for progression to confirmed candidature. The recommendation is forwarded back to the Office of Research for the Research Degrees Committee to consider. The Principal Supervisor may discuss the proposed feedback with the candidate including appropriate responses to the feedback, with advice that the final outcome is yet to be determined by the Research Degrees Committee, and will be communicated to the candidate by the Office of Research.

- If revisions to the application for progression to confirmed candidature are required, the candidate will make these revisions within the specified timeframe and before the oral presentation to the satisfaction of the Principal Supervisor.

- The HDR confirmation of candidature presentation is scheduled. The presentation is chaired by the School Research Director/HDR Coordinator and includes the confirmation panel. The format for the presentation is detailed above.

- Once the presentation has been completed the confirmation panel determines whether the candidate needs to complete additional work to the research proposal. The candidate will be advised by the confirmation panel of any further points that need to address in the confirmation of candidature document.

- The candidate will then revise the confirmation of candidature documents to the satisfaction of the Principal Supervisor and submit a revised application for progression to confirmed candidature to the Office of Research by the due date accompanied by a point-by-point response to the independent reviewer’s written comments on their written confirmation of candidature and the confirmation panel’s comments (if applicable) on their oral presentation.

- The School Research Director/HDR Coordinator and Principal Supervisor will review the revised application and if approved, submit it for approval by the Research Degrees Committee. If not approved, feedback will be provided to the candidate via the Principal Supervisor.

School of Nursing and Midwifery

1. The Office of Research reminds the candidate and the supervisor of the deadline for confirmation two months ahead of time.

2. The supervisor submits two reviewers (who must be external to the supervisory team) to review the research proposal and requests approval by the School Higher Degree by Research (HDR) Coordinator, within one week of notification.
3. Within two weeks the candidate provides an “Application for Progression to Confirmed Candidature form”, their updated Research Plan and a research proposal document to Office of Research who will forward it to the School HDR Administrative Assistant (SHDRAA). The SHDRAA informs the School HDR Coordinator and arranges the sending of the proposal to the reviewers, the organisation of the confirmation panel process and the tentative planning of the confirmation presentation.

4. The reviewers must submit a review within four weeks to the SHDRAA who distributes this to the confirmation panel and to the candidate.

5. The SHDRAA organises the confirmation presentation.

6. Following the confirmation presentation a meeting of the confirmation panel determines whether the candidate needs to complete additional work and makes a provisional recommendation. The recommendation for progression to confirmed candidature form is completed by the panel and must include:
   a. Confirmation presentation date
   b. Number of weeks to continue as probationary candidate (where applicable)
   c. Signatures of the reviewer/s, school HDR Coordinator and Head of School.

7. The outcome of the panels’ discussion and its provisional recommendation is communicated to the candidates.

8. The SHDRAA then sends the form to the Office of Research for Research Degrees Committee consideration.

9. The Office of Research formally notifies the candidate of the outcome of their application to progress to confirmed candidature.

**Confirmation Panel membership**

The confirmation panel will consist of the following:
- The School HDR Coordinator (Chair)
- The supervisory team
- Where possible the independent reviewers

**Confirmation panel processes**

The confirmation presentation will occur following the candidate receiving the reviewer’s comments and subsequent revision of the research. Following the confirmation presentation the confirmation panel will meet to discuss the presentation and determine recommendations. The candidate will be informed of the confirmation panels’ provisional outcome and recommendations. The candidate will be advised of the final outcome by the Office of Research after the Research Degrees Committee has considered the confirmation panel’s provisional recommendation.

**Process for proposal resubmission and re-review where necessary**

At the confirmation panel meeting a timeline for re-submission and re-review (if applicable) will be set to the satisfaction of all parties.

3. **Confirmation of Candidature Reviewers**

University Confirmation of Candidature outcomes are described in section 12.7 – 12.8 of the Higher Degrees by Research Candidature – Procedures. The following details of local requirements for independent reviewers of confirmation of candidature research proposals.

**Faculty of Arts and Business**

Independent reviewers of applications to progress to confirmed HDR candidature 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

School of Education

The confirmation panel is chaired and established by the School of Education Portfolio Leader Postgraduate and HDR. It consists of the Principal Supervisor, Co-Supervisors and at least one independent reviewer. The independent reviewers are nominated by the Principal Supervisor. These nominations should include at least one person external to the University of the Sunshine Coast with expertise in the field. As the purpose of confirmation is to provide feedback on the development of the research proposal, it is typical that confirmation proposals will include two independent assessors. It is expected that all members of the confirmation panel will review the research proposal and will be present at the Confirmation seminar. The purpose of the confirmation reviewers is to provide feedback to support the candidate's development as a researcher and to provide advice and to assess whether the candidates has the potential complete the proposed research plan using the method identified, and whether this research meets the required level for the program being completed e.g. PhD or Masters by Research.

School of Health and Sport Sciences

The independent reviewer of applications to progress to confirmed HDR candidature is asked to provide feedback in 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 that the project requires to be successful

The reviewer is asked to consider:

- whether the project (as described) is of quantity and quality for a MSc/PhD confirmation
- whether there is an appropriate match between the research aims, proposed methods and outcomes
- whether ethical aspects has been addressed associated with the proposed research project/s
- whether the project is realistic and practical within the timeframe for completion
- whether the writing style is of adequate academic standard (including style, composition, grammar, and punctuation)
- whether the candidate has adequately considered how the project outcomes will be disseminated
- if applicable, whether the candidate can be upgraded to a PhD degree based on the depth and novelty of the proposed research project

School of Nursing and Midwifery

Reviewer selection

- Normally two reviewers, both of whom are external to the supervisory team, who can provide a constructive critique of both the methods and the topic
- Must be approved by school HDR Coordinator
- Must be available to complete the review within four weeks and to attend the confirmation presentation either in person or by videoconference or other means.
The reviewer(s) is/are requested to provide as 1-2 page written report on the following:

- The breadth and depth of the literature review
- How well the candidate has demonstrated a firm grasp of the knowledge, methods, techniques and logistics that the project requires to be successful
- Whether the progress (as described) is of quantity and quality suitable for a MSc/PhD confirmation
- Whether the future direction of the MSc/PhD project is clearly described
- Whether there is an appropriate match between the proposed future direction and the stated aims of the MSc/PhD project
- General presentation (layout, spelling, grammar, structure)

School of Science and Engineering

The prime purpose of the confirmation document is to provide evidence of a candidate’s capabilities to undertake original academic research of high quality, and whether the candidate is likely to complete it within the set period. It also provides evidence about the novelty of the research and whether it is practicable and will result in publication outputs.

We ask reviewer to please address each of the following 10 questions:

1. Does the writing adhere to commonly accepted standards in scientific publishing, including aspects of prose, style, composition, grammar, and punctuation?
2. Does the literature review demonstrate that the candidate has read widely, covering the field in sufficient depth and breadth?
3. Is there solid evidence that the candidate can synthesize existing knowledge with intellectual rigour and formulate testable hypotheses that are logically coherent?
4. Has the candidate a firm grasp of the methods required to obtain robust empirical data?
5. Has the candidate demonstrated sufficient knowledge about the numerical techniques required to analyse the data?
6. Is the project novel and innovative, likely producing research outcomes that will be publishable?
7. Is the project realistic, practicable and within the scope usually accepted appropriate for a PhD/MSc?
8. Are the future milestones appropriate and consistent with the stated aims?
9. What is the likelihood of a timely completion?
10. Are projected publication outputs reflective of scientific quality (e.g. impact factor of journals or similar)?