

## PhD Confirmation of Candidature Guidelines

Within twelve months of admission for full-time candidates and twenty-four months for part-time candidates, the candidate shall present (in consultation with their supervisory team) a report of the research program for the remainder of the candidature and a report on the work done up to this point.

The process requires candidates to submit a 30-50 page report to a Panel for review and then verbally present key elements of this to the Panel at a session open to a broader audience. The Panel then provides written and oral feedback to the candidate and makes a recommendation to the faculty and University on the progress of candidature. It is primarily a formative rather than a summative process. Possible outcomes are detailed below. The goal of feedback is to inform and impact positively on the quality of work as the candidature progresses.

A candidate who is not able to complete Confirmation of Candidature within the time frame must apply for an extension at least one month in advance of that deadline through the faculty committee to the Research Degrees Committee. Normally, a maximum of three months extension may be granted.

### Advice to the candidate

Start writing the document as soon as possible. The literature review will be updated after Confirmation but often the structure and content at Confirmation is very similar to the review provided in the final thesis. By Confirmation, the topic and scope should be very well defined.

Work on Confirmation should commence after completion of Stage 2. Attendance at Confirmation seminars and review of documents prepared by other candidates will assist in understanding requirements and starting to plan the structure and content of the Confirmation report and presentation. Consider also the range of workshops and training available. It will be the supervisory team who will determine the date of the Confirmation Seminar. Discuss in advance with them their availability and possible dates for your presentation. Liaise with your Faculty Research Office to determine specific faculty processes associated with Confirmation and the timing of these e.g. when should you submit the online form and/or your Confirmation document in relation to the date for your Confirmation seminar.

Listen to and/or read carefully the Panel's advice and take the opportunity to seek clarification on feedback. Think ahead if there are any questions you have of the panel, concerns you have about the work you have decided to do. Accept the feedback as positive and collegial, designed with your interests in mind. If the immediate outcome is not entirely successful, engage with your supervisory team and panel members to work through any issues. Be open to new ideas and suggestions.

### The Confirmation report

The Confirmation report shall incorporate a substantial literature review and shall provide evidence of the research capacity of the candidate including the rate of progress to this point. The report shall include, but is not limited to, details of:

- the title of the thesis
- the type of thesis presentation eg. by publication, monograph or creative works;
- a time-line for completion of the research program;
- the nature of participation in scholarly activities of the centre, school, or faculty in which the study is being undertaken;
- the objectives of the program of research and investigation and its relationship to published research in the same field;
- The research methods to be followed; and
- the REIS quizzes having been completed (attach completion certificates as an appendix to the Confirmation document).

You are strongly encouraged to present the outcome of plagiarism checking (attach summary output report from plagiarism checking tool as an appendix to the Confirmation document).

Articulating students must include the following additional details in the Confirmation document:

- reasons for requesting articulation;
- a timeline indicating how the PhD will be completed within 3 years full-time (or part-time equivalent) accounting for prior load from the current award;
- suitability of the current research topic for a PhD level research study; and
- documentation relating to funding arrangements (eg. Financial guarantee, scholarship offer, letter of variation) if you are currently receiving a scholarship/sponsorship which you have approval to continue upon articulation OR have been offered to receive upon successful articulation. Please note that by not providing this information it may delay the articulation process.

The Confirmation report will identify:

- What work is to be done;
- Why this work is significant;
- What about the work is original and represents a contribution to knowledge;
- When the work will be completed including indicative research outcomes; and
- How the work is to be done.

Consideration should be given to the limitations of the proposed work, implications for further work and any informing requirements such as ethical clearance.

### **Format of the Seminar**

Normally, the Confirmation Seminar is open to the public and should be widely advertised by the faculty so as to ensure attendance by researchers and research students from both within and outside of the faculty. In some faculties, family and friends are welcome to attend. Make sure they are aware of the pressures and significance of this milestone. Thus they will understand when you are busy and when they can celebrate with you, your success in reaching and hopefully, meeting the demands of this critical milestone.

While the presentation must be well-structured and informative, it is unlikely to be an exhaustive presentation of all that is provided in the written document. The Chair will act as facilitator, moderator and time-keeper to ensure the Confirmation Seminar is a formative peer-review event for the candidate. The panel is provided a copy of the work no less than seven (7) days before the event. The presentation is for up to 45 minutes with up to 20 minutes for questions from the panel and audience. Practice your presentation among friends or family to ensure that you keep to the allocated time. Try to anticipate possible questions and consider how you will answer them. The presentation will highlight key aspects of the project; it is not a reading of the text of the Confirmation. From the presentation, the audience and panel would expect to appreciate the value of the project and feel confident about the candidate's capacity to conduct the project.

At the end of the seminar the panel will normally meet separately with the candidate for further discussion and to provide more complete and explicit feedback. This would be expected to take about 30-40 minutes, and include advice on the recommendations the panel will make and the changes expected to the work, if any. A full written report will normally be provided within a week. Where the recommendation is that more than three months (full-time equivalent) is required for resubmission of the Confirmation document, the candidate will be placed Under Review. This recommendation needs to be approved by the faculty and RDC prior to formal implementation. In these cases, the formal notification of the Confirmation outcome should be expedited to the relevant faculty nominee and to RDC for approval.

## The Panel

The faculty constitutes a Confirmation Seminar panel of at least 3 members to attend the seminar which should include the Principal Supervisor, Head of School, HDR Coordinator or nominee and a senior member of faculty staff from outside the school or centre in which the candidate is located. Their role is to evaluate the quality of the candidate's research skills and the quality of the project. They are there to identify possible weaknesses and opportunities in the project and to provide advice on how to progress successfully to completion.

The panel shall normally be chaired by an objective, appropriately qualified, faculty member and shall question the candidate on the content of the Confirmation Report at the conclusion of the seminar. Each member of the panel must receive a copy of the Confirmation document at least seven (7) days prior to the Confirmation Seminar. The panel will be asked to comment on the work and to attend the seminar and participate in a discussion with the candidate after the seminar.

The panel, and particularly Panel Chair, has responsibility for managing the framework and conduct of the seminar. They ensure sufficient time is given for the candidate to present and for the audience to ask questions. Further, they have a role in ensuring that the peer review, discussion and scholarly debate of ideas is positive and enabling, and that the rigorous interrogation of ideas does not give way to personal, inappropriate questioning or to criticism focused at the presenter rather than the ideas.

The Panel Chair has a responsibility to ensure that they are familiar with the following policies and procedures:

- MOPP section relating to Higher Degree Research candidates (D/5.3);
- Code of Good Practice for Postgraduate Research Studies and Supervision at QUT (MOPP D/5.4);
- PhD Course Regulations;
- Confirmation Guidelines (current version as approved by RDC);
- Any specific faculty considerations.

Panel Chair duties may include:

- opening and moderating the Confirmation Seminar including introducing the Candidate (topic, course, supervisory team and institute affiliation, if applicable) and panel members;
- advising the format of the event and the Confirmation Seminar requirements (eg. presentation timing, questions from the floor directed by Chair);
- reiterating that the seminar is a formative experience aimed at supporting progress. Questions should be relevant and reasonable, engaging the student's topic and areas of interest and expertise;
- maintaining appropriate conduct of the seminar in line with peer review and a quality assurance process to support candidate progress;
- ensuring the candidate has the opportunity to present their research and receive formative feedback via questions or advice that supports the candidate's progress;
- providing advice where questions, or the nature of the questions, are deemed inappropriate;
- appointment of a timekeeper, if appropriate;
- discussing Confirmation Seminar procedures and possible outcomes with the candidate;
- guiding panel members regarding Confirmation Seminar procedures and possible outcomes in line with QUT policy and Confirmation Seminar guidelines;
- liaise with the candidate in conjunction with the supervisory team, prior to seminar, where the panel members have raised concerns about the quality of the document for Confirmation Seminar and readiness for the milestone;
- casting the final vote where the panel is split regarding the recommendation to be made; and
- preparing the final report of the Confirmation Panel.

The Chair should, at the start of the seminar, inform participants who may not be familiar with the format that:

- The purpose of the seminar is to provide useful feedback and peer review to the candidate;
- There is a Confirmation report that has informed this presentation;

- There will be time given to questions at the end of the presentation and that questions should be asked in a constructive and positive manner;
- The work presented is a work in progress and will be informed and guided by the feedback provided by the Confirmation Seminar process;
- The Chair reserves the right to adjudicate to ensure that the session runs smoothly, meets requirements and keeps to time.

The Panel should review the [QUT Code of Conduct](#) to become familiar with the expectations in terms of behaviour of QUT staff and students in this context. The Panel has a responsibility to the candidate and university to seek to ensure that the terms of this code are observed during seminars.

The Panel will prepare a report and make a recommendation regarding the Confirmation Seminar to the faculty and Research Degrees Committee based on their deliberations. This will also be provided to the candidate for reference, normally within one week of the seminar. The panel report will be uploaded within the online Confirmation milestone form.

### **Confirmation Outcomes**

The Confirmation Review Panel shall review the candidate's progress and planned research program and shall submit their recommendations on the prescribed online form via the Faculty to the Research Degrees Committee. The panel report will include:

- names of panel members in attendance and overall dissenting views (when raised) should be noted;
- quality of the evidence provided at the Confirmation seminar of the research capacity of the candidate ;
- an appraisal of the candidate's progress to date and suitability for continuation in the PhD program;
- an appraisal of the proposed research project, Research Plan and other components of the course of study for the remainder of the program;
- a statement regarding whether or not the study continues to be within the aims and objectives and physical and human resources of the centre and/or School
- comments on the Confirmation seminar presentation
- other comments regarding the student's submission (including feedback given to the student)

Candidates who are undertaking Confirmation in order to articulate from a Masters by Research or a Professional Doctorate (Research) at QUT must complete the Confirmation process. The Confirmation Review Panel will be asked to comment on the following:

- The student's ability to perform at the PhD level including evidence of meeting PhD entry requirements as per regulations;
- The student's ability to complete within three years full-time (or equivalent), including time enrolled in previous award;
- Suitability of the student's project for the PhD;
- Proposed supervisory team consistent with QUT policy (MOPP D/5.3 and HDR Supervisor Guidelines); and
- Prior load to be carried over from previous course.

Any elapsed candidature in the Masters or Professional Doctorate will be deducted from the time available within the PhD candidature. Usually Confirmation later than 13 months (1.1 EFTSL) of commencing the Masters is not recommended. In these circumstances, completion of the Masters would be preferable, thus allowing for the full term of the three year PhD when the candidate commences the new award.

In considering the application for Confirmation of Candidature, the Research Degrees Committee, on advice from the panel:

- will, if the conditions are met, confirm the candidature unconditionally; or

- will, if the conditions are met, confirm candidature, but request minor changes to the confirmation document to be completed in less than 1 month full-time equivalent to the satisfaction of the supervisory team and faculty; or
- will, if appropriate, provisionally approve the confirmation, but request changes to the confirmation document to be completed within 3 months full-time equivalent that will need approval from the Research Degrees Committee before confirmation is confirmed; or
- may, if the recommendation of the faculty is not to confirm the candidature immediately, return for resubmission. A new Confirmation document will be submitted in HiQ within 3 months full-time equivalent and will require RDC approval; or
- reject the confirmation, with the candidate asked to show cause why they should not have their PhD candidature terminated OR reject the request to articulate to the PhD.

The panel may also recommend:

- that the student be placed Under Review; OR
- be asked to Show Cause in the PhD due to unsatisfactory progress; OR
- recommend downgrade to the Masters by Research; OR
- remain in Masters by Research as articulation was not approved.

Where a candidate is placed under review following the Confirmation process, the Principal Supervisor must advise the candidate within seven days of the seminar of the conditions to be met in the form of clear, written guidelines on the work to be completed and due dates for the submission of materials and whether a further Confirmation Seminar is required. Download the [template](#) to request an Under Review period. The conditions must be endorsed by the supervisor(s) and Faculty nominee as appropriate and be forwarded within fourteen days to the Research Students Centre for noting by the Dean of Research and Research Training.

Where a candidate's progress remains unsatisfactory after the Under Review period, the Research Degrees Committee, on advice from the faculty, shall either grant a further extension of the Under Review period of up to three months or, after giving the candidate the opportunity to show cause why one of the following courses of action should not be taken:

- terminate the candidature with an offer of admission to the degree of Masters by Research, or
- terminate the candidature with no such offer.

### **Topics dealing with sensitive issues**

It should be acknowledged that the point of research studies is to seek to create new knowledge and that this may challenge existing ideas, values or ideals. Candidates have a responsibility to ensure that sensitive issues are managed with care, giving due consideration to the rights of others.

All participants have a responsibility to listen to the point of understanding and respect contrasting points of view. The spirit of discussion is intended not to encourage the imposition of beliefs but rather the sharing of disparate views and frameworks that may support the candidate in their work.

### **Intellectual Property and/or Confidentiality Agreements & their effect on the presentation**

Where aspects of a candidate's work are subject to Intellectual Property and/or confidentiality agreements, it is for the candidate and supervisory team to prepare the presentation in light of these or alternatively notify the faculty and university of any concerns or constraints. In exceptional circumstances, and only with the prior approval of Research Degrees Committee, seminar participation may be restricted and, as appropriate, participants may be asked to sign confidentiality and/or non-disclosure agreements. Where QUT is a party to these agreements, the Office of Commercial Services can assist with ensuring appropriate arrangements.

If agreements do not involve QUT, the candidate is strongly encouraged to seek independent legal advice.

QUT cannot give guidance in these matters as there is a risk to the candidate that their objectivity may be compromised. Limited free legal services are available through the Student Guild.

### Ethical Clearance and its effect on the format

Where aspects of the candidate's work or data are subject to ethical clearance provisions, it is for the candidate and supervisory team to prepare the presentation in light of these. In exceptional circumstances, and only with prior approval of Research Degrees Committee, seminar participation may be restricted. De-identification of sensitive data is the more usual approach to addressing concerns in this context. For further advice on appropriate arrangements, please contact the Faculty Research Ethics Advisor and/or the University's Research Ethics Officer.

### Related Links

- MOPP D/5.3 Higher degree research candidates: [http://www.mopp.qut.edu.au/D/D\\_05\\_03.jsp](http://www.mopp.qut.edu.au/D/D_05_03.jsp)
- Code of Good Practice for Postgraduate Research Studies and Supervision at QUT: <https://www.student.qut.edu.au/research/policies-and-procedures>
- MOPP D/2.6 Code of Conduct for Research: [http://www.mopp.qut.edu.au/D/D\\_02\\_06.jsp](http://www.mopp.qut.edu.au/D/D_02_06.jsp)
- PhD Course Regulations: <https://www.qut.edu.au/study/phds-and-research-degrees/phds>
- Confirmation Seminar form and resources and Under Review guidelines and resources: <https://www.student.qut.edu.au/research/your-degree/milestones>

### Approval & modification history

DATE	AUTHORITY	DETAILS
4 May 2015	QUT Research Degrees Committee	Reviewed – amended to reflect changes in online form.
September 2014	QUT Research Degrees Committee	Reviewed and updated to include more detail on role of Panel, Panel Chair & Supervisory team; more detail on outcomes.

**Responsible Officer:** Secretary, Research Degrees Committee; RSC Coordinator – Candidature & Examinations