Research Higher Degree Confirmation of Candidature and Progression Review Policy and Procedure

Policy Category	**Policy**/guideline/**procedure**/rules		
Review	1 year from date of Approval		
Policy Code	ARP001		
Contacts	policy@top.edu.au		
Version	Approval Authority	Approval Date	Commencement Date
2015.10	Academic Board	22 October 2015	22 October 2015

Background

This policy and procedure controls the formal completion of the probationary phase of a Research Higher Degree student's candidature. The confirmation process attempts to assess formally the extent to which students are 'on track' during the early period of their candidature and consequently, whether or not their candidature should be extended. In this sense, the policy comprises an integral part of the quality assurance processes.

The specific aims of the policy are to:
1. Identify early in students' candidature any support and guidance necessary for their proceeding successfully to the next major stage of their research;
2. Assess progress to date and the academic preparedness of the candidate to complete their degree (or course);
3. Provide an opportunity for the candidate to demonstrate written and other necessary research skills appropriate to the postgraduate research level of study; and
4. Achieve more timely and successful completions.

Supervision

Research Higher Degrees are supervised degrees involving research and the preparation of a thesis earned but under the guidance of a principal supervisor and at least one co-supervisor. These supervisors are appointed by the Higher Degree Research and Scholarship Committee on the recommendation of the Senior Director, Research. The Principal Supervisor must have previously supervised to successful completion at least one candidate. Co-Supervisors who

supervise to successful completion one candidate can become Principal Supervisors.

Supervisors must be listed on the Register of Higher Degree Research Supervisors which is maintained by the Higher Degree Research and Scholarship Committee. Principal Supervisors must normally be members of the TOP. Academic staff and would normally have as a minimum qualification the degree which they are supervising.
Further detail on the appointment and roles of research higher degree Supervisors is contained in the TOP *Research Higher Degree Registration and Roles of Supervisors Policy*.

Student

Once Candidates have accepted an offer and enrolled they must contact the Principal Supervisor and agree on a time for Formal Induction. Both parties must sign off when the induction has occurred and forward detail to the Senior Director, Research. The induction process will involve the signing of a contractual agreement between parties and documentation of a regular communication schedule during candidature which involves a minimum of six monthly progress reports.

CONFIRMATION

Confirmation Purpose
The confirmation process is a requirement of enrolment in a HDR hat is included to support candidates in the early stages of their candidature. The process will allow candidates to receive objective confirmation that their research direction is sound, the methodologies appropriate and the standard of writing satisfactory. Any difficulties that might impede successful completion can be identified and remedied.

Confirmation Requirements
As outlined in the *Research Higher Degree Confirmation of Candidature and Progression Review Policy*, in order for candidature to be confirmed the following tasks or milestones must normally be met by candidates. Candidates are required to have:
1. Presented a detailed research proposal for formal approval within the first 9 months of candidature;
2. Completed an annotated bibliography or literature review if not included in the proposal;
3. Applied for ethics approval where relevant;
4. Passed safety course where required;
5. Completed successfully any required coursework units;
6. Completed other approved development activities needed e.g. units in statistics, academic writing, intellectual property and electronic literacy including use of electronic databases; and
7. Presented their progress to date at an interview with the Confirmation Panel (an interview without the presence of the Principal Supervisor will also be available

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to students).

At the interview with the Confirmation Panel candidates are required to satisfy the following requirements:

    i.   Present to the Confirmation Panel a written document containing at least:
- a critical review of recent work in the field,
- an updated research proposal,
- an updated plan of research,
- an updated timetable for completion of the thesis,
- a comprehensive statement of the resources required to complete the project within the funded period.

    ii.   deliver an oral presentation to the Confirmation Panel,

    iii.   provide a verbal defence of the research proposal before the Confirmation Panel. In addition, the issue of ethics and safety approvals, intellectual property, thesis format and components, and data retention and management must also be considered and addressed.

Confirmation Panel Structure

A Confirmation Panel, an advisory body to the Higher Degrees, Research and Scholarship Committee (HDRSC), will be set up for each candidate comprising at least 3 of the following:
- The Principal Supervisor
- Senior Director, Research or nominee
- Deputy Principal (Academic) or nominee
- A representative who is there at the invitation of the student
- An external practitioner in the discipline area.

Panels may co-opt additional expertise as required for each candidate.
One member who is not the Principal Supervisor is to be appointed by the Higher Degrees Research and Scholarship Committee as Chair.

Confirmation Presentation Process

The Supervisor will recommend alternative dates for the presentation that will be finalised by considering the availability of panel members. The Research Services Office will notify the candidate and supervisor(s) of the presentation details and request the submission of the written proposal which will then be passed to the Chair of the Confirmation Panel for distribution to the Panel members with sufficient lead-time to allow the Panel to read the documents prior to the oral presentation. The Chair of the panel will also be provided with the **Confirmation Panel Evaluation Form** for completion.

The candidate will deliver their oral presentation in an open forum to the Panel which other HDR candidates and academics from the discipline will be encouraged to attend. As a guide, it is expected that the oral presentation would run for approximately 20-30 minutes.

The Panel members are expected to ask questions of the candidate about their proposal and the candidate will have the opportunity to address the Panel and provide a verbal defence of their research proposal.

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The Panel will review their findings and determine an outcome. They will record their evaluations, outcome and feedback on the **Confirmation Panel Evaluation Form (Appendix 1)** provided by the Research Services Office and forward all of the documentation to the Chair of the HDRSC for ratification. The Panel is to provide the result and feedback to the candidate as soon as possible after the outcome has been determined.

Unsatisfactory Progress and Termination of Study

Non-compliance with Confirmation of Candidature

Students failing to comply by refusal to participate in, or refusal to sign off on, their confirmation of candidature will be deemed to have made unsatisfactory progress. The procedure followed will be the same as that under the Unsatisfactory Progress procedure below.

Unsatisfactory Progress

Unsuccessful confirmation attempt

If the Panel determines that the candidate's candidature is not confirmed, the Panel shall document the aspects of the confirmation process which were inadequate, and the candidate will normally be required to undergo the confirmation process again within three calendar months (or longer if the candidate is enrolled part time). The candidate should be provided with appropriate support during this phase by Top and a documented intervention strategy should be developed by the Chair of the HDRSC in consultation with the Candidate and all Supervisors to assist the student in deficient areas.

If, after the second presentation, the Panel determines that the candidate cannot be confirmed, the Panel must make a recommendation to the Chair of the HDRSC requiring the candidate to show cause to the HDRSC as to why their candidature should be permitted to continue.

In the event that the Confirmation Panel does not recommend confirmation of candidature, it is essential that the Confirmation Panel report is sufficiently detailed. In these cases the Confirmation Panel's recommendations should include:
- An unequivocal statement of the panel's recommendation;
- A detailed statement on the quality of the candidate's work with regard to the standard required for candidature, including the candidate's application to the project, initiative shown in devising and developing the project and the overall progress to date;
- A detailed statement of all the reasons for the recommendation not to confirm the candidature, indicating all the deficiencies of the proposal;
- A statement outlining the intervention strategies that were implemented;
- A statement of what other options, if any, have been discussed with the candidate.

Where progress is deemed to be unsatisfactory, the student will be given the opportunity to respond to a 'show cause' letter from the Chair of the HDRSC. Students must respond to the Chair of the HDRSC within 21 days of receipt of the letter.

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The HDRSC will review the 'show cause' correspondence, will notify the student of the Committee's recommendation, and in the case of an unfavourable decision, inform the student of the appeal process.

The decision on unsatisfactory progress is final, barring the exercise of the right of appeal. The HDRSC will provide a recommendation, through the Academic Executive Committee (AEC), to the Academic Board to implement that decision.

Lack of Supervision

The Higher Degree Research and Scholarship Committee, on the recommendation of the Senior Director, Research and the Deputy Principal (Academic) may recommend termination of candidature if it is satisfied that the Institute cannot provide adequate supervision for the candidate. In such circumstances, the Institute will provide administrative and financial assistance to the student to facilitate transfer to another institution.

This action must not be used as a solution for problems arising from unsatisfactory relationships between the supervisor(s) and the student.

Appeal against an unsatisfactory progress outcome

As detailed in the *Research Higher Degree Confirmation of Candidature and Progression Review Policy*

a. Students will have the right of appeal against any unfavourable recommendation of the HDRSC. The formal appeal must be made in writing to the Deputy Principal (Academic) within 21 days of the receipt of the advice of the unfavourable recommendation.

b. Appeals will be permitted on procedural grounds only. Procedural grounds for appeal may include:
   i. Procedural irregularities in the conduct of the Confirmation process; and
   ii. Documentable evidence of prejudice or bias on the part or one or more of the members of the Confirmation Panel.

PROGRESS UPDATE

Progress Update Purpose

The purpose of the research progress update is for candidates to present an update on their HDR project to an audience that includes fellow HDR candidates and academics in their relevant discipline. The seminar is an opportunity to strengthen collegiality and it helps to enable timely identification and resolution of any issues that may be impacting a student's progress. It is not intended to replace the regular reporting of progress by students and supervisors during the student's candidacy.

Progress Update Requirements

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The progress update seminar should consist of:
1. Statement of research aims/objectives/questions
2. Statement of the main research findings to date
3. Statement of what has been written to date, and what remains to be written
4. Statement of other tasks to be completed, a timeline for completing these tasks, and an expected submission date
5. Statement of any obstacles to progress.

A written document is not required but students are encouraged to use presentation aids such as PowerPoint or Whiteboards etc.

This material should be presented in a 15 to 30 minute oral presentation, followed by questions from the Progress Panel and audience. The candidate may also be required to meet with the Progress Panel to discuss their work-to-date and future tasks. It is acceptable, and in some cases may be assessed by the Supervisor(s) as highly desirable, for candidates to make more than one progress update seminar.

Progress Update Panel Structure

A Progress Panel, an advisory body, will be set up for each candidate. It should contain as many members as possible of the candidate's Confirmation Panel. The Progress Panel should consist of a Chair and a minimum of 2 additional academic staff members and contain no more than one of the student's supervisors although the panel may seek advice on the candidate's project and progress from all supervisors.

Progress Update Seminar Process

The Supervisors will recommend alternative dates for the presentation that will be finalised by considering the availability of panel members. The Research Services Office will notify the candidate and supervisor/s of the presentation details and will provide the Chair with a **Progress Update Seminar Panel Evaluation Form (Appendix 2)** for completion.

The candidate will deliver their oral presentation in an open forum to the Panel at which other HDR candidates and academics from the discipline will be encouraged to attend. As a guide, it is expected that the oral presentation would run for approximately 15-30 minutes.

The Panel members are expected to ask questions of the candidate about their project and the candidate will have the opportunity to address the Panel.

The Panel will review their findings and determine an outcome. They will record their evaluation, outcome and feedback on the **Progress Update Seminar Panel Evaluation Form** provided by the Research Services Office and forward all of the documentation to the Chair of the HDRSC for ratification. The Panel is to provide the result and feedback to the candidate as soon as possible after the outcome has been determined.

Concerns about timely completion

If the Panel determines that it has concerns about the candidate achieving a timely completion, The Panel shall document the reasons for its concern. The candidate will the need to be provided

with appropriate support during this phase and a documented intervention strategy should be developed by the Chair of the HDRSC in consultation with the Candidate and all Supervisors to assist the student in dealing with the concerns raised by the Panel

Related Documents:

1. Research Higher Degree Confirmation of Candidature and Progression Review Policy
2. Research Higher Degrees Assessment and Assessment Appeals Policy
3. Research Higher Degree Registration and Roles of Supervisors Policy

Version Control:

Historical Version	Approved by	Approval Date
2015.10	Academic Board	22 October 2015

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Appendix:

Appendix 1 **Progress Update Seminar Panel Evaluation Form**

This form is to be completed by the Chair of the Progress Panel in response to a candidate making a progress update seminar presentation. The Progress Panel will have received and read the candidates written proposal in support of the confirmation.

Candidate Details	
Name:	Student No:
Date of Progress Seminar: Date of Meeting (if relevant):	Current program level: ☐☐ MBR ☐☐ PhD
Expected Submission Date:	Enrolment End Date:

Outcome	Tick relevant outcome
The candidate is making satisfactory progress towards a timely completion	
The Progress Panel has concerns about the candidate achieving a timely completion	

Please provide information that justifies the basis for your decision.

If the panel has concerns about the candidate achieving a timely completion please elaborate these concerns.

If possible, recommend strategies for addressing any shortcomings or obstacles.

Progress Panel Members

Chair of the Panel: (Must not be a supervisor of the candidate)

Name: _____

School:

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

2nd Panel Member:

Name: _____

School:

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

3rd Panel Member:

Name: _____

School:

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

4th Panel Member:

Name: _____

School:

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Please forward this evaluation form to Chair of the HDRSC

Chair of the HDRSC:

Please provide any relevant comments including details of any follow up action:

_____

Name: _____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

PLEASE ENSURE ALL DOCUMENTS ARE SENT TO THE RESEARCH SERVICES OFFICE, ASAP.

RSO USE ONLY:
Copy of Confirmation Panel Review document sent to student & supervisors:_____/_____/_____
Student acknowledgement received:_____/_____/__ _____
Student system updated: /_____/__ _____

Appendix 2 **Confirmation Panel Evaluation Form**

This form is to be completed by the Chair of the Confirmation Panel in response to a candidate undertaking confirmation. The Confirmation Panel will have received and read the candidates written proposal in support of the confirmation.

Date of Confirmation: _____/_____/_____

Candidate Details	
Name:	**Student No:**
Current program level: ☐☐ MBR ☐☐ PhD	
Confirmation is being assessed at the following level: ☐☐ MBR ☐☐ PhD	
Confirmation Panel Members	

(1st) Chair of the Panel: (Must not be a supervisor of the candidate)

Nam

e:

Role

:

(2nd) Panel

Member: Name:

Role:

(3rd) Panel   _____

Member: Name: _____

Role:

(4th) Panel

Member: Name:

Role:

(5th) Panel

Categories for Evaluation

1. Critical review of recent work in the field	YES	NO
Preliminary literature review completed.		
Literature review demonstrates adequate understanding of research area.		
Comments:		

2. Updated Research Proposal		
The overall research proposal should be assessed in terms of the feasibility, aims, significance, and originality. The scope of the research should be appropriate for the degree.		
	YES	NO
Overall research proposal is accepted:		
Comments:		

3. Research Plan	YES	NO
Research design and methods appropriate to the project:		
Candidate displays sound knowledge of field of research:		
Draft thesis outline appropriate, given the stage of research:		
IP issues:		

Comments:

4. Updated timetable for completion of the thesis	YES	NO
Draft timelines are appropriate and achievable**:**		
Comments:		

5. Resource Implications	YES	NO	N/A
Adequate infrastructure and funding:			
Adequate technical support available:			
Other resources:			
Further training or assistance required: (If "Yes" please provide details below)			
Comments:			

6. Oral presentation delivered to the Confirmation Panel in an open forum:		
Duration of presentation (mins):		
Venue of presentation:		
Approx. number of attendees:		
Oral presentation demonstrates a sound understanding of the research topic:	YES	NO

Comments:

	YES	NO
7a. Did the Confirmation Panel question the candidate to obtain a verbal defence of the research?		
7b. Was the verbal defence of the research appropriate given the stage of the research?		

Comments:

8. Data Retention and Management:	YES	NO
Data storage provisions for this research meet the guidelines under section 2 of the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* and Top's *Record and Data Management Policy*		

Comments:

9. Ethics	YES	NO	N/A
Is human ethics approval required?			
Has approval been granted by the *Human Research Ethics Committee*?			
If no, is the student aware of the required processes to gain such approval and the timeframe for gaining approval?			

Comments**:**

10. Outcome	Tick relevant outcome
The candidate is CONFIRMED (NOTE: Conditional confirmations are NOT permitted)	
2nd Attempt Required **The candidate is NOT confirmed and is required to undertake confirmation again within 3 months (FTE).** The Research Services Directorate will coordinate the second attempt in the same manner as the first. **NOTE: A documented intervention strategy to assist the candidature will be developed by the Chair of the HDRSC.**	
The candidate is NOT confirmed **A recommendation is hereby made to the Chair of the HDRSC to advise the student they are required to show cause to the HDRSC as to why their candidature should be permitted to continue.**	

Comments:
Where the recommendation is 2nd Attempt Required, the Panel must detail here or in an attachment the reasons for their decision and ensure that sufficient written feedback is given to support the development of an intervention strategy.

a) Where the recommendation is Not Confirmed the Panel must provide here or in an attachment:
An unequivocal statement of the panel's recommendation;
A detailed statement on the quality of the candidate's work with regard to the standard required for candidature, including the candidate's application to the project, initiative shown in devising and developing the project and the overall progress to date;
A detailed statement of all the reasons for the recommendation not to confirm the candidature, indicating all the deficiencies of the proposal;
A statement outlining the intervention strategies that were implemented;
A statement of what other options, if any, have been discussed with the candidate.

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Feedback to Candidate

If detailed feedback comments have not been made on the previous evaluation pages you may summarise your feedback for the candidate here.
Please note the candidate will receive a copy of the completed evaluation form.

11. The Confirmation Panel offer the following feedback to the candidate:
Critical review of recent work in the field:
Research proposal:
Plan of research:
Oral presentation:
Defence of research:

Signatures and Ratification

12. Signatures of Panel members:
By signing this form Panel members agree with the outcome documented at item 10 and have formulated feedback to be provided to the candidate.

1) Panel Chair: Name:

Signature: _____   Date:_____/_____/ _____

£Feedback has been provided to the candidate, OR,

£Feedback will be provided to the candidate by_____/_____/ _____

2) Panel Member:

   Name: _____

   Signature:_____   Date:_____/_____/ _____

3) Panel Member:

   Name: _____

   Signature:_____   Date:_____/_____/ _____

4) Panel Member:

   Name: _____

   Signature:_____   Date:_____/_____/ _____

5) Panel Member:

   Name: _____

   Signature:_____   Date:_____/_____/ _____

13. Chair of the HDRSC:

a. The following confirmation documents are

   attached: Research Proposal (from item 2)

              Research Plan (from item 3)

              Updated timetable (from item 4)

b. I am satisfied that this outcome was determined in accordance with the Confirmation Year Guidelines, that any mandatory training has been undertaken and that due process was followed.

c. I have confirmed that the Chair of Panel has provided feedback to the candidate

d. If any member of the Panel was a supervisor of the student please justify the reasons here:

Name: _____

Signature: _____   Date: _____/_____/ _____

PLEASE ENSURE ALL DOCUMENTS ARE SENT TO THE RESEARCH SERVICES OFFICE, ASAP.

RSO USE ONLY:

Copy of Confirmation Panel Review document sent to student & supervisors: _____/_____/ _____

Student acknowledgement received: _____/_____/ _____

Student system updated: _____/_____/ _____