

CONFIRMATION YEAR GUIDELINES

PURPOSE

These guidelines have been prepared to provide a minimum and consistent standard for the confirmation year for Research Higher Degree candidates. They should be read in conjunction with the *Code of Practice for Research Higher Degree Candidates*. Other supporting documentation includes the *Candidate Cover Sheet*, and the *Confirmation Committee Evaluation Form*.

The forms and the guidelines may be adapted to meet the needs of specific discipline groups, however any adaptations must be approved by the Dean of Graduate Studies.

Candidates and supervisors are encouraged to view the Confirmation Year process as a positive strategic tool that will benefit candidature. The majority of candidates report that the process provides structure, focus, motivation and greater confidence.

BACKGROUND

The confirmation year requirement

The purpose of the confirmation process is 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. The process also encourages candidates to start writing, which many find difficult early in their candidature.

In accordance with the Rules Governing Research Higher Degrees, candidates are required to satisfy the following requirements:

- i. Present to the Confirmation Committee a written document containing at least:
 - o A critical review of recent work in the field,
 - o An updated research proposal,
 - o An updated plan of research,
 - o An updated timetable for completion of the thesis,
 - o A comprehensive statement of the resources required to complete the project within the funded period.
- ii. Deliver an oral presentation to the Confirmation Committee,
- iii. Provide a verbal defence of the research proposal before the Confirmation Committee.

In addition, the issue of ethics and safety approvals, intellectual property and data retention and management must also be considered and addressed.

GUIDELINES

In these Guidelines “Committee” means the Confirmation Committee convened by the School to undertake the Confirmation Year evaluation.

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1. Timing

The University of Newcastle requires Research Higher Degree candidates to undertake a confirmation process within twelve months of commencement of candidature on a full-time basis (or part-time equivalent). In exceptional circumstances, the Dean of Graduate Studies will consider written requests to extend this period providing the supervisor and Head of School support an extension.

All candidates may elect to undertake confirmation earlier with the support of their supervisor/s and Head of School/Nominee. It is recommended that part time PhD candidates undertake confirmation within 18 calendar months.

A thesis may not be accepted from candidates who commenced from 2006 onwards if the confirmation year requirement has not been met.

2. Roles & Expectations

Candidates

- Should communicate with their supervisors regularly about the confirmation year process.
- Are to read and understand the requirements and process as set out in these guidelines and in the Code of Practice for Research Higher Degree Candidature (<http://www.newcastle.edu.au/policy/000061.html>).
- Where applicable, are to read and understand the issues related to:
 - a. intellectual property, (<http://www.newcastle.edu.au/policy/000831.html>);
 - b. ethics and safety (<http://www.newcastle.edu.au/candidates/research-higher-degree/candidates-guide/ethics.html>), and;
 - c. data retention (http://www.newcastle.edu.au/Resources/Divisions/Research/Office%20of%20Graduate%20Studies/Research%20Higher%20Degrees/docs/Code_Responsible_Conduct_Research.pdf).
- Are responsible for the lodgement of the candidate cover sheet and written proposal to their supervisor.
- Will deliver their presentation to a Confirmation Committee and provide a verbal defence of their research.
- May contact the Chair of the Committee following the outcome if clarification is needed.

Supervisors

- Are to be aware of the process and the possible outcomes.
- Will engage with their candidates about the requirements and ensure they have the best opportunity to be confirmed in their degree.
- Must not be Chair of the Confirmation Committee.
- Are to note that it is recommended they not be a member of the Confirmation Committee. This is to allow for high level of independent review and perspective
- Are expected to attend their candidates' confirmation presentations.
- Will liaise with School convenors and the Confirmation Committee in relation to the submission of the confirmation year documents for their candidates.

Schools/Heads of Schools/Nominees

- Are responsible for coordinating confirmation year presentations including dates and venues and keeping candidates and supervisors informed. These arrangements will

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be made for candidates identified by the Office of Graduate Studies as being due for confirmation.

- Will arrange for confirmation year presentations to be held in an open forum with other RHD candidates and academics in the discipline area encouraged to attend
- Will provide sufficient advance notice to candidates, allowing for finalisation and submission of their confirmation documents and presentation.
- Heads of Schools/Nominees will approve the membership of the Confirmation Committees, ensuring that a supervisor is not the Chair of the Confirmation Committee and noting that it is recommended that supervisors are not members of the Committee.
- Heads of Schools/Nominees sign off on the confirmation outcome and provide the documentation to the Faculty ADRT.

Confirmation Committees

- Will evaluate the written proposal and the oral presentation and ask questions of the candidate in relation to their research.
- May seek to address the candidate or supervisors, together or separately following the presentation.
- Will review their findings and determine an outcome.
- Will record their evaluations, outcome and feedback on the [Confirmation Committee Evaluation Form](#) and forward all of the documentation to the Head of School/Nominee for ratification.
- The Committee is to convey the outcome and feedback to the candidate as soon as possible after the outcome has been determined.

Faculties

- ADRTs (or nominees) will undertake the role of Faculty information source and will ensure that supervisors are fully briefed regarding the confirmation year process.
- They will also ensure that an appropriate level of feedback has been provided to the candidate.
- ADRTs will sign off on the completed confirmation year documentation and forward it to the Office of Graduate Studies.

Dean/OGS

- The Dean of Graduate Studies will hold regular briefings for candidates and supervisors.
- The Office of Graduate Studies will provide data to schools, candidates and supervisors every four months regarding confirmation due dates .
- The Office of Graduate Studies will provide official notification of the outcome and finalised confirmation year evaluation documentation to candidates and supervisors.
- The Office of Graduate Studies will record and file the confirmation year outcomes.

3. Notification of the confirmation year requirement to candidates

The Office of Graduate Studies and International Admissions provide candidates with information on the confirmation year process in their offer letter. Further detailed information is provided through compulsory induction, which is delivered via a structured seminar each semester and is also available on Blackboard.

The Dean of Graduate Studies will hold regular, confirmation specific briefings, for candidates and supervisors.

The Office of Graduate Studies will notify candidates and supervisors when the due date for

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confirmation is approaching. The Schools will contact candidates with information about their confirmation venue and timing.

4. Identification of candidates

The Office of Graduate Studies will provide candidate data (obtained via NUSTAR queries) to Schools every four months detailing individual candidates who are required to undergo confirmation within the following three to four months. Details of candidates who are overdue in meeting the requirement will also be provided and explanations will be required. To assist Schools with planning, the details of candidates whose due date will fall early in the next reporting period will be included.

Off-campus candidates are required to participate in the confirmation process. The Code of Practice states at D(xvi) that it is the responsibility of external and off-campus candidates to attend the campus at least once each year for discussions with supervisors. It is expected that the first annual visit would be the occasion for the confirmation review, otherwise alternative arrangements such as video conference or teleconference will be required.

5. Confirmation Committee Structure

The Committee should comprise a minimum of three members suitably qualified to assess the candidate and with significant experience in dealing with research candidates.

It is a requirement that a candidate's supervisor is not the Chair of the panel and it is recommended that supervisors of the candidate not be members of the panel.

The membership of the Committee is to be approved by the Head of School/Nominee.

A suggested model for the composition of the panel is:

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|------------------------|--|
| 1 st Chair | School or discipline RHD Convenor/Head of Discipline (not a supervisor). |
| 2 nd member | Member of the discipline closely aligned with the research area. |
| 3 rd member | Academic external to the discipline or school with related research expertise. |

6. Confirmation Year Process

The Office of Graduate Studies will provide data to Schools, supervisors and candidates every four months outlining who is required to undertake confirmation.

The School will coordinate the dates and venues for the presentation and convene the Confirmation Committee. The format for the confirmation presentation will be an open forum with other RHD candidates and academics from the discipline encouraged to attend.

The School will notify the candidate and supervisor/s of the presentation details and request the submission of the *Candidate Cover Sheet* and written proposal.

The candidate will complete the cover sheet, attach their written proposal and provide these to their Principal Supervisor who completes their section of the cover sheet. The Supervisor then gives the form and the written proposal to the Chair of the Confirmation Committee for distribution to the Committee members with sufficient lead-time to allow the Committee to read the documents prior to the oral presentation.

The candidate will deliver their oral presentation in an open forum to the Committee. As a guide, it is expected that the oral presentation would run for approximately 20-30 minutes.

The Committee should ask questions of the candidate about their proposal and the candidate will have the opportunity to address the Committee and provide a verbal defence of their

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research proposal.

The Committee will review their findings and determine an outcome. They will record their evaluations, outcome and feedback on the [Confirmation Committee Evaluation Form](#) and forward all of the documentation to the Head of School/Nominee for ratification. The Committee is to provide the result and feedback to the candidate as soon as possible after the outcome has been determined.

Heads of Schools/Nominees sign off on the confirmation outcome and provide the documentation to the Faculty ADRT. The ADRT will ensure that an appropriate level of feedback has been provided to the candidate and that a suitably documented evaluation is available for OGS to send to the candidate. The ADRT will sign off on the completed confirmation year documentation and forward it to the Office of Graduate Studies.

The Office of Graduate Studies will provide official notification of the outcome, send the student and supervisor a copy of the confirmation year documentation, and seek acknowledgement of receipt. They will record the outcome on the student system and file the original documents. Where an international candidate receives an outcome that involves a second attempt at confirmation, the Office of Graduate Studies will notify the relevant parties that a documented intervention strategy is needed in accordance with the Education Services for Overseas Students Act.

7. Confirmation and Transfer of Program

Candidates who seek to transfer (upgrade, downgrade or change research area) into a new program must be confirmed in this new program.

It is recommended that the confirmation year process and the transfer process be combined. Confirmation paperwork must be received by OGS in line with the semester census dates of 31 March and 31 August in order for the transfer to take effect for that semester.

The additional requirements to be considered and addressed for candidates confirming as part of a transfer are:

- The supervisory capacity of the School/Discipline/Faculty has been established and there are sufficient resources available to successfully support the candidature, including continued scholarship support if applicable.
- The rates of any continuing scholarship stipend and/or supplementation are confirmed by the supervisor and Head of School and cost collectors provided where applicable.
- The candidate is working well and consistently and has maintained regular contact with supervisor/s.
- The candidate has produced assessable evidence of quality research achievements and that any required skills have been gained.

Transfers involving a sideways change (ie: PhD-Software Eng to PhD-Computer Science) or a downgrade (PhD to MPhil) will be managed case-by-case taking into account whether the confirmation process has already been undertaken and what other evidence exists in support of the research direction, methodologies and standard of writing.

Please refer to the 'Transfer' section of the [Variation to Candidature Form](#) and provide the relevant supporting documentation.

8. Consistency of practice and recording of process

As the confirmation process is a requirement of candidature, it is necessary to record the outcomes on the candidate's file and NUSTAR record.

The *Confirmation Committee Evaluation Form* is to be used by the Committee to record the

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outcomes of the process. The aim of this form is to ensure consistency of practice across the University. It mirrors the requirements of the process as per the Code of Practice (item D (vii)).

9. Outcomes

There are three primary outcome categories. Faculties may recommend variations within the outcome categories in specific situations. For example, a downgrade to a Masters level program may be recommended. The Committee will provide feedback to the candidate and supervisor/s.

The outcome categories are:

- **Confirmed**
- **2nd Attempt Required** - The candidate is not confirmed and is required to undertake confirmation again within 3 months FTE). The School will coordinate the second attempt in the same manner as the first.
- **Not Confirmed** - A recommendation is made to the Dean of Graduate Studies to advise the student they are required to show cause to the Research Training Sub-Committee as to why their candidature should be permitted to continue.

10. Unsuccessful confirmation attempt

If the Committee determines that the candidate's candidature is not confirmed, the Committee 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 (FTE). The candidate should be provided with appropriate support during this phase by the School.

If, after the second presentation, the Committee determines that the proposal is unsatisfactory, the Committee must make a recommendation to the Dean of Graduate Studies requiring the candidate to show cause to the Research Training Sub-Committee as to why their candidature should be permitted to continue.

After consideration of the candidate's submission, the RTSC may terminate the candidature or place conditions on continuation. The candidate may appeal the decision as detailed in the relevant Rules and Schedule.

In the event that the Committee does not recommend confirmation of candidature, it is essential that the Committee report is sufficiently detailed. In these cases the Committee'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 of what other options, if any, have been discussed with the candidate (eg downgrade to a Master level program).

The termination of candidature and associated appeal processes are outlined in the Rules Governing Research Higher Degrees <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/policylibrary/000830.html>)