# **DEAKIN UNIVERSITY RESEARCH AND RESEARCH TRAINING COMMITTEE**

**GUIDELINES FOR CONFIRMATION OF HIGHER DEGREES BY RESEARCH CANDIDATURE PROCESSES**

**HDR Confirmation**

Deakin University Higher Degree by Research (HDR) candidates are admitted on a provisional candidature basis and must undergo a confirmation process before being allowed to progress to full candidature. The purpose of the confirmation process is to assess progress and support candidates in the early stages and to determine whether or not work to date indicates a strong likelihood of a quality thesis being completed in the required time. 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 encourages candidates to start writing early in their candidature to overcome some of the barriers to preparing the thesis in a timely fashion. It also provides an opportunity for candidates to demonstrate oral presentation skills appropriate to the masters and doctoral levels of study. The process should be fair, equitable and supportive.

HDR candidates who commenced candidature from 2010 onwards are required to undertake a confirmation process within 12 months of commencement of full-time candidature (or 18 months if part-time) for a doctoral candidate and 6 months full-time for a masters candidate (or 12 months if part-time). Doctoral candidates should be aiming to submit their thesis within 3 years (**including** the period of provisional candidature leading up to confirmation) if enrolled full-time, or 6 years if part-time. Masters theses should be submitted within two years if full-time (four years if part-time).

The confirmation process described in the rest of this document relates only to PhD and masters candidates. The Doctor of Psychology program has a specific confirmation process – further information is available from the School of Psychology.

**Confirmation Requirements**

Candidates must satisfy the following requirements:

* Present to a Confirmation Panel (see composition below) a written document containing at least:
  + A critical review of recent work in the field;
  + An updated research proposal and/or research question;
  + A statement about the status of any relevant ethics approvals and/or intellectual property agreements, including ownership, location and storage of data;
  + An updated plan of research, including progress made to date;
  + An updated timetable for completion of the thesis;
  + A statement of the resources and facilities required to complete the project within the appropriate candidature period.
* Deliver an oral presentation and verbal defence of the research proposal to the Confirmation Panel.

In the case of creative arts disciplines, the candidate should present to the Panel for endorsement, a proposal on an integrated format appropriate for a thesis of this nature. In the confirmation process a weighting will be given to the written dissertation/exegesis and the creative work unless an alternative weighting is deemed appropriate as relevant to the discipline. The Faculty and/or School will provide specific details to candidates on requirements.

Faculties and/or Schools shall determine the specific requirements of oral presentation and written submission. Oral presentations will typically be 20-30 minutes in length, but may vary from this in particular Schools. Written submissions are usually 10,000 -15,000 words in length but may vary according to discipline-specific requirements. Written submissions should be provided to the Panel members prior to the oral presentation (normally 2-3 weeks).

**Panel Composition**

The Panel shall typically be composed of the Head of School or Associate Head of School Research or nominee, School HDR Coordinator, Principal Supervisor, Associate Supervisor[s], 1-2 senior researchers, and an active researcher from outside the School. The Panel will appoint a Chair, normally the Head of School or Associate Head of School Research or nominee. Faculties and/or Schools may have other specific requirements and may modify the composition to suit discipline-specific requirements. However it is important that candidates feel enabled to complete the confirmation process successfully. The Panel composition and size should be carefully selected with due consideration of fairness and equity for the candidate.

**Responsibilities of Faculties and Schools**

Please note that this document presents a guideline of minimum expectations. Faculties and/or Schools may have additional discipline-specific requirements which candidates will be expected to fulfil. Faculties and Schools should ensure that the University guidelines and minimum requirements are adhered to and that their specific requirements are clearly communicated to staff and candidates. The candidates should be clear on the objectives, the timelines, the process of confirmation and the consequences and procedures if not confirmed (see below). Candidates should be advised to discuss and prepare for confirmation in consultation with their supervisor[s].

* Candidates will be advised of the membership of the Confirmation Panel, the date of the presentation and the details of the format of the presentation by the Chair of the Panel.
* The Panel will determine an outcome following the presentation and consideration of the written submission (and advise the Head of School of the recommendation if they were not a member of the Panel).
* The Chair will write to the candidate and inform them of the outcome. A copy of the Panel Report is to be included and the candidate is required to acknowledge receipt to the Faculty or School office. The Faculty or School will keep a copy of the documentation and candidate's acknowledgement in the candidate's file.
* The Chair shall also provide a copy of the report including the recommendation in relation to confirmation of candidature to the Research Services Division, whether favourable or unfavourable. Research Services shall update the candidate’s file once the report and recommendation are received.
* Faculties and/or Schools shall advise internal School and Faculty committees, Associate Deans Research, HDR Coordinators and Research Administration staff as is deemed relevant and appropriate.

**Possible outcomes of the confirmation process**

There are three possible outcomes of the initial confirmation process:

1. Candidature is confirmed, and the candidate’s enrolment is converted to full candidature.
2. The candidature is not confirmed, but candidates are given an opportunity to revise their work and submit to a second confirmation process. The Panel will document any aspects that it considers were inadequate, and the updated confirmation document should address these aspects. Details of the second-chance confirmation procedure will be determined by the Chair of the Panel and the candidate will be advised in writing. The candidate will normally be required to undergo the confirmation process again within three months. The Panel may appoint an Adviser to assist the candidate with preparation for the final submission to the Confirmation Panel.
3. The Confirmation Panel deems that confirmation has not been completed satisfactorily.

At the conclusion of a second-chance confirmation process following outcome 2 on the first confirmation, outcomes 1 or 3 would be the only options available.

For candidates who do not satisfactorily complete the confirmation process (outcome 3), possible options include:

* for provisional doctoral candidates, a transfer to masters by research candidature;
* withdrawal from HDR candidature (possibly accompanied by enrolment in another course such as a coursework masters or graduate diploma);
* exclusion from candidature.

If the recommendation is that candidature should not be confirmed, the Panel will discuss with the candidate the options available to them. If exclusion from candidature is recommended, the Panel will make that recommendation to the Research and Research Training Committee, providing copies of earlier documentation and all correspondence relating to the candidate’s confirmation. Candidates may request a review of the Committee’s decision and may also appeal. The review and appeal processes are outlined in the HDR Academic Progress Procedure.

It is important that candidates are aware of their rights and responsibilities under the HDR Procedures and that the process for confirmation is conducted in a fair and equitable manner. All candidates are provided with a copy of the Guide to Candidature: Higher Degrees by Research on enrolment, and can access a copy on the web: <http://www.deakin.edu.au/research/admin/hdradmin/guide/>