

## **School of Nursing and Midwifery**

### **Confirmation of Candidature Document 2011**

#### **Confirmation of Candidature**

The confirmation of candidature is an important 'quality control check' required by the University before a probationary candidate becomes a confirmed PhD candidate. The main function of the confirmation process is to assess whether the proposed research project is consistent with the University's definition of the PhD degree. The Confirmation Committee's task is therefore to gauge whether the candidate can achieve this within the stipulated three year period (for full time candidates) given their progress during the first year. Above all else, the confirmation process should benefit the student. The student and Confirmation Committee should be able to exchange ideas about the student's research in an atmosphere that is free of intimidation and recrimination.

#### **Purpose of Confirmation**

Confirmation is a key point in candidature. Its purpose is to determine whether or not work to date on the PhD research proposal indicates a strong likelihood that it will result in a high quality thesis.

PhD candidates are first admitted as 'probationary' candidates except those who have converted from a Masters by Research, or in some cases, have transferred from HDR enrolment at another institution.

Probationary candidature is normally for a minimum of six (6) months and a maximum of twelve (12) months (or 12 - 18 months for part-time students); ending once confirmation is confirmed.

The purposes of confirmation are to:

- Assess progress to date and the academic preparedness of the candidate to complete;
- Determine whether the candidate has developed a clearly defined, coherent and feasible research project and contribute suggestions for its successful completion;
- Determine that any specific requirements for confirmation of candidature have been met;
- Provide an opportunity for the candidate to demonstrate written and oral presentation skills appropriate to PhD level study; and
- Publicly acknowledge a major milestone in the project and inform others about the research project.

## Preparing for Confirmation of Candidature

To prepare for Confirmation of Candidature candidates should:

- Check the specific guidelines for confirmation;
- Prepare early;
- Write the outline of your written research proposal as early as you can, then rewrite it as the project takes shape;
- Practise your oral presentation skills – enlist the critical feedback of others;
- Check that any specific requirements for your confirmation will have been met by the confirmation due date; and
- Carefully check over your proposed timelines for the next two years.

## The Process

After 6-12 months of satisfactory progress (12-18 months for part-time candidates), a PhD candidate can be confirmed. The candidate is asked to:

- Submit a written proposal (6,000 – 10,000 words) outlining detailed project/thesis proposal, progress to date, timetable for completion, and literature review;
- Give an oral presentation of 20-30 minutes duration on the project (allowing time for questions) at the Confirmation Committee meeting;
- Verbally defend the proposed research project with the Confirmation Committee; and
- Return the confirmation form (marking sheet) to the Manager - Collaborative Programs and Research within the Faculty of Health.

The confirmation committee must contain the supervisor(s), Head of School (or nominee), HDR Coordinator (or nominee) and other academic members of the School who's expertise are relevant to the area of research, and one external researcher from outside of the school (or University). Committee members are expected to prepare for the meeting by reading the report. It can often be helpful to discuss the report with other committee members (including supervisors) beforehand. During the defence the Confirmation Committee will assess the feasibility and resource requirements of the proposed project and offer suggestions towards its successful completion. The confirmation committee recommendation must be signed off by the confirmation committee members, the HDR co-ordinator and the Head of School.

## Guidelines for Committee Members

The confirmation process is intended to benefit the student by identifying problems early. The student will also benefit from the committee's independent and expert review of the proposed research. It is particularly helpful if you can indicate to the student whether their proposed timeline will allow them to address their key hypotheses and achieve their research aims by the time their thesis is due. It is critical that the committee draw the student's attention to major flaws in their research design. If a student's research is technically challenging and likely to lead into areas well removed from the supervisor's usual area of expertise (which is not uncommon), then the committee may also find it helpful to suggest the appointment of an additional supervisor with relevant skills.

Any changes to supervisory arrangements should be done openly and in consultation with both the student and existing supervisor(s). The change of supervisor form can be found at [http://www.deakin.edu.au/research/admin/hdradmin/forms/candidature/Change\\_Of\\_Supervisor\\_Recommendation.pdf](http://www.deakin.edu.au/research/admin/hdradmin/forms/candidature/Change_Of_Supervisor_Recommendation.pdf)

## The Outcomes

The Confirmation Committee, after considering the student's report and presentation, can make one of the following recommendations to the Head of School:

1. The candidate's enrolment is confirmed;
2. The candidate's enrolment is maintained and extended for a maximum period of three months full time equivalent, during which time a second review will occur;
3. The committee recommends the student transfer to a Masters degree;
4. Cessation of candidate's enrolment.

Most candidates are expected to be confirmed and, as all committee members must sign the report, this should be the committee's unanimous opinion. Confirmation should not be delayed if the report has to be modified. Extensive modifications can be handled by reconvening the committee after a short period during which the student can make the necessary changes. Extending the probationary period should only be considered when there is evidence the candidate has not assiduously applied themselves to the course or has otherwise made unsatisfactory progress.

Extensions of 3-6 months are usual but longer extensions can be helpful in more extreme cases. When the committee commends an extension, the candidate should be told in writing by the school HDR coordinator why they have not been confirmed and what they need to do before confirmation can be reconsidered. This letter should be sent no later than five (5) working days after the committee meeting. The supervisor(s) should also be advised to monitor the student closely during the extended probationary period, to keep written records of all supervisory meetings, and to document any further evidence of unsatisfactory progress. Termination of candidature is a last resort and should only be considered for students whose talents clearly lie in other directions. This recommendation must only be made after

consultation with the Head of School (if Head of School was not present at the confirmation meeting and was represented by a nominee) by the schools HDR Coordinator (if HDR Coordinator was not present at the confirmation meeting and was represented by a nominee) and after consultation with Research Services.

### **Students should prepare for confirmation of candidature via the following process:**

1. Prepare a confirmation progress report of at least 6,000 – 10,000 words which should include:

- The aims of the research;
- Preliminary literature review;
- A clear rationale for the work to be undertaken;
- A hypothesis, hypotheses, or a clear statement of the questions which will be addressed by the research;
- An outline of the methodology to be used;
- A report on the work undertaken to date and the skills obtained;
- An outline of the future work to be undertaken and an indication of the time frame;
- A comment on any new skills which need to be acquired;
- A statement that Ethics Committee approval has been obtained or comments on the ethical implications of the study and proposed submission date for approval (if required);
- A brief discussion of the originality of the work; and
- Clear evidence that the candidate possesses the skills to complete the work or has realistic plans to acquire these skills.

Any abstracts presented at conferences or published in journals can be submitted as appendices.

The principal supervisor is responsible for assembling the Confirmation Committee panel and for ensuring that the written materials are forwarded to the Committee members at least 2 weeks prior to the date of the Confirmation Committee meeting.

The report is expected to demonstrate that the student has identified an original research question; has designed an appropriate and feasible study of adequate scope to investigate the research question; is able to write competently; has made significant progress with the investigation to date and has an achievable timeline for completion.

### **2. Meeting of confirmation committee**

The candidate is required to give an oral presentation of 20-30 minutes duration (allowing time for questions). This presentation should clearly outline the aims and objectives of the research, the questions being addressed, the rationale, the choice of methodology and the intended outcomes, with an indication of current progress. Where appropriate the

confirmation meeting can be performed via remote technology (teleconference or video conference)

The Confirmation Committee panel will normally include at least:

- The supervisor(s), **and**
- The Head of School or nominee (a nominee being an active researcher, preferably at Professor/Associate Professor level), **and**
- The School HDR coordinator or professorial nominee of Head of School as Chair, **and**
- A researcher from outside of the School (or University)
- Associate and research supervisor(s) should be present if possible.

The Committee will provide oral and/or written feedback on the written material and the presentation/discussion to facilitate the preparation of a written report for the candidate, which will be prepared by the supervisor. A private meeting of the Committee following the presentation, questions and discussion will be used to discuss any further aspects or supervisor's comments/concerns, and to finalise a recommendation on confirmation.

The written report on the work and the Committee's comments should be completed by the supervisor within five (5) working days of the presentation, in discussion with any associate/co supervisors. The supervisor is required to provide a written report for the candidate together with a recommendation on confirmation. The written report should include an overview of the comments, advice and recommendations from the Committee. This report should identify the Committee members and be signed/authorised by the supervisor and the Committee's Chair.

The report should include a recommendation, which will be one of the following:

1. The candidate's enrolment is confirmed.
2. The candidate's enrolment is maintained and extended for a maximum period of three months full time equivalent during which time a second review will occur.
3. The committee recommends the student transfer to a Masters degree.
4. Cessation of candidate's enrolment.

For (1) and (2) above, copies of the written report should be given to the candidate and sent to the Head of School for signature, identifying any action required. A copy of the written report, accompanied by the written information submitted by the candidate, will then be forwarded to the Manager - Collaborative Programs and Research within the Faculty of Health, along with the completed Confirmation Report Form signed by all members of the Confirmation Committee.

If the recommendation is (2) the candidate must be given clear guidelines in writing from the HDR Coordinator detailing the requirements to be completed and the format of the second review.

If the recommendation is (3) the student and principal supervisor are to liaise with the HDR Coordinator to see what options are available to the student

If the recommendation is (4) the Associate Dean – Research will forward all information to the Deakin University HDR Committee, and the University will inform the candidate in writing of their decision.

Confirmation of PhD candidature is not automatic and the Confirmation Committee must be confident that the proposed project is original, feasible and of adequate scope to satisfy Deakin University's expected standards for a PhD.

### **Guidelines for Panel Members**

Panel members will receive written documentation two (2) weeks prior to the Confirmation Committee meeting. It is the member's responsibility to have read all documentation. Members are to consider the quality of the written work, the oral presentation and the candidate's ability to answer questions and then make a recommendation on the candidate's status. A decision regarding the candidate's status will ideally be made at the Confirmation meeting or within 24 hours of confirmation.

### **After Candidature is Confirmed**

Each confirmation committee has a continuing role during a student's candidature and the student should be able to approach members individually or to reconvene the committee as the need arises. Additionally, should a problem arise that the student and supervisor haven't been able to resolve on their own, the members of the committee may be contacted to assist to resolve the situation. If the problem is particularly serious, the advice of the Head of School or an impartial representative from Research Services should be contacted and advice sought.

School of Nursing & Midwifery February 2011

Adapted from School of Health & Social Development Confirmation of Candidature Document 2007