

# HDR CONFIRMATION GUIDELINES

School of Life &  
Environmental Sciences  
2020



## Confirmation Process

The objectives of the confirmation process are: i) to provide an opportunity for the candidate to demonstrate that they are capable of producing a substantial body of new knowledge in the field of investigation that will be the basis of their PhD thesis, ii) to present the scientific validity of the overall PhD project, iii) to demonstrate the feasibility of the overall PhD project, and iv) to receive feedback and suggestions from the school and the confirmation panel. The ultimate objective is to provide help to candidates, and to their supervisory team, towards a successful completion of the PhD program.

The review panel for the Confirmation process is comprised of the Associate Head of School (Research), the campus HDR Coordinator, the candidate's supervisor(s), an external panel member and if possible/available, other co-supervisors (including external supervisors) and other academic members of LES. The panel will use the Confirmation document, together with the Confirmation seminar, to evaluate whether the project is planned in a manner that will allow the candidate to complete their PhD within three years, to determine whether the candidate's progress is on track and to ensure that the candidate has adequate support to reach their project aims.

Following the Confirmation seminar, each candidate will be given feedback from the panel, and if the above objectives are met, the confirmation of candidature will be conferred. If these objectives are not met, the candidate will be given tasks that must be satisfied in order to pass the confirmation process.

## Written Document

The purpose of the written confirmation document is to provide a summary of background literature, an overview of the intended PhD topic and the agreed plan for how the research objectives will be achieved. The content of the document should reflect substantial reading, preliminary trials of methods and preliminary data (if appropriate), a project plan (including experimental design, timeline, expected outputs, publication plan and target journals) and in-depth discussions with the supervisory team.

The written document should be **NO MORE THAN 15 PAGES** (including references) of polished text that demonstrates an understanding of your topic and effectively communicates the activities and timeframes for how you will accomplish your project aims. Please use 12 pt text, line spacing of 1.5 and margins no smaller than 1.2 cm. Note that this is less than what is suggested by Research Services (see link below). Please include:

1. Title and 100 word summary.
2. A brief introduction to the subject area (this would be expanded if the focus of the thesis was a review).
3. The context of your project (write about theories, questions or knowledge gaps to be filled and hypotheses to be tested).
4. Research plan: including chapter headings and sections for proposed work (similar to a thesis table of contents).  
Make sure that your plan makes clear how your project will make a distinct contribution to the field. This section should also provide a clear description of the type of data expected to be generated and relevant experimental and analytical approaches associated with each research chapter. This will assist the confirmation panel in determining if the student / supervisory team requires assistance with experimental design and data analysis

to ensure a timely project completion. Additionally, this section MUST also include risk management plans (or contingency plan) for methods or parts of the work that may be difficult to accomplish, and/or at risk of possible delay, and/or dependent on external factors (e.g. field seasons, specialised equipment, external collaborators, etc.).

5. Report progress so far: This section should include description of summary data if this is appropriate or available. However, please do not include extended methods/results sections. In the potential absence of data (e.g. for HDR student taking confirmation early in their candidature, i.e. at 6 months) please summarize progress made with respect to experimental design and other facets of research project management (e.g. ethics/permits/ordering essential items).
6. Publication plan, including potential target journals (specifying impact factor, audience and rationale for the choice) and proposed dates of submission.
7. Timetable for your entire candidature, including progress made to date.
8. Financial and other resources required and how these are to be met.

## Confirmation Seminar

The Confirmation includes a 20 minute seminar (open to the public, typically LES staff and students) followed by 10 minutes of questions from the panel and members of LES. The objective of your seminar is for you to describe i) what is your original contribution to your field of research, ii) what specific aims you have and iii) how you plan to achieve these aims. Because our school is quite broad, please make your seminar understandable to those who do not work in your field of research. The layout of your oral presentation should attempt to address the same key topics described in your written confirmation document, i.e.:

- Title.
- A brief and general introduction to the subject area.
- The context of your project.
- Research plan.
- Progress so far (n.b. in lieu of no data, discuss experimental design and facets of research project management).
- Publication plan.
- Timetable for your entire candidature, including progress made to date.

The Confirmation document should be submitted to the HDR Coordinator on your campus no later than 2 weeks before your scheduled seminar. Please be aware that documents that do not conform to these specifications will not be accepted.

Presentation style: Remember being able to present complex and specialized topics in a concise manner and in a way that is engaging and understandable by a broad audience is a key skill expected from good scientists, and therefore an extremely important skill you need to develop during your PhD.

## Confirmation Panel

Following the Confirmation seminar, each candidate will sit with a panel in a ~45-minute round table discussion. This panel comprises yourself a panel chair (HDR coordinator), supervisors and an external panel member/s. During this time, the panel will provide specific feedback on your Confirmation document and seminar and discuss your project. The premise of the panel discussion is to be constructive and positive (which is easy because your projects are often exciting and interesting)- so please do not think of it like a job interview nor a cross-examination.

It is hoped that the panel can raise questions to candidates and supervisors to inform discussion around key areas that include:

- the conceptual quality (i.e. it will lead to an advancement) of the project,
- check technical/logistical feasibility (that the aims are matched by achievable project design and resourcing and there is room for contingency) of the project
- For any preliminary results please assess if they are adequately analysed.
- To identify potential issues of difference/ conflict between the candidate and supervisors. For this aspect, to provide details in confidence, we will first ask the supervisory team to step outside for ~5 minutes to allow the candidate to voice any issues around this matter- following this we will then ask the supervisors to return.

## Use the confirmation meeting to tell the panel chair what you think and feel!

During the panel meeting, those panel members directly (e.g. supervisors) related to your project are required to step outside of the panel room for 5-10 minutes. This “alone” time is for you to speak freely and candidly about your project and experiences to date.

Because this discussion is in confidence, you are able to discuss “anything” positive, neutral or negative about how you, or your project, is going. From the school’s perspective using this part of the panel discussion effectively is important as it is often the first time that candidates can raise any concerns about project experience or progress. Nothing is too trivial for you to discuss during this phase of the panel discussion, and it can potentially allow the Panel chair to address any matters that might otherwise escalate to affect your experience or progress down the track. We, of course, provide the same option to your supervisors for similar reasons.

## Outcomes

The panel will make a decision on their recommendation of which there are four outcomes:

1. The candidature is confirmed and the candidate’s enrolment is converted to full candidature
2. The candidature is **NOT confirmed until minor amendments** are provided to aid clarification of project details and resubmit their written document at a future specified date.
3. The candidature is **NOT confirmed until major amendments** are undertaken and in this case the candidate is required to revise the work and submit to a second confirmation process within 3 months.
4. The candidature is NOT confirmed

## Key tips

Do not entirely reinvent the wheel- seek help from your supervisors about preparing the written document and seminar. Have a chat to other HDR about how they prepared for this event.

Expect to allocate ~3-4 weeks to complete preparation of the presentation and written documents.

## Next Steps

The next step will now involve campus-specific HDR coordinators contacting you well in advance to organise an appropriate meeting time during the year to organise your confirmation panel.

Generally, you will be asked to attend a confirmation panel at one of the multiple key dates during the year (e.g. panels tend to run 4-6 times on each). Please be patient with allowing the HDR coordinators to organise these meetings-as getting multiple academics and external panel members into the same room at the same time is a non-trivial task. Nevertheless, we would expect you to be aware at least 3 months prior to your confirmation date so to ensure you have had adequate time to prepare for this event.

Please feel free to contact your supervisors or campus-specific HDR coordinators

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## Additional Information

[Deakin University CoC Summary](#)