

Higher Degrees by Research Candidature Progression - Guidelines



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1. Introduction

1.1 These Guidelines provide specific detail referenced in Section 9 of the Higher Degree by Research Candidature – Procedures, describing the timing and expectations for successfully completing each milestone throughout candidature and processes for extensions, candidature reviews, response to show cause, discontinuation of candidature and grievances.

2. Milestones

Milestones are program requirements and periodic assessments of candidature progression. Milestones are distributed throughout HDR candidature providing structure and mechanism for regular review and feedback on progress towards both the research project and attainment of the University's Research Graduate Attributes.

In addition to HDR program milestones, some candidates may also have:

- project milestones (such as external progress reports to third party funding providers) that they are required to contribute to; and
- scholarship conditions as specified in their scholarship conditions document

2.1.

Conditions of Candidature

2.1.1 HDR Student Induction

All commencing HDR students are required to complete the HDR Student Induction to ensure that they have the opportunity to be oriented with the University's research training context and student support services and systems. The materials are available online and students are expected to work through the content at their own pace prior to the next scheduled HDR Student Induction session following their commencement.

This condition is recorded as completed after attendance at the HDR Induction session and successful completion of the HDR Induction quiz.

2.1.2 Research Integrity and Ethics training

All candidates are required to complete the Research Integrity Online (RIO) module within two months of full-time equivalent candidature. No exemptions will be permitted.

This condition is recorded as completed when the candidate submits their Completion Certificate after successful completion of the quiz at the conclusion of the module.

2.1.3 Coursework

Some HDR programs include coursework components as part of the program. This coursework is recorded as a condition of candidature and requires satisfactory completion and a minimum grade attainment of "pass", or as specified in the program description.

If deemed appropriate by the enrolling unit at the time of admission, a condition of coursework may be included in an offer for admission, including the requirement to be met in order to meet the condition.

Students who have not satisfactorily completed a coursework condition of candidature by the due date will be invited to show cause why their candidature should not be discontinued.

2.1.4 Other Conditions of Candidature

Other conditions of candidature may be imposed as part of the initial offer of admission, or during candidature as recommended by the enrolling unit or the Dean, Graduate Research. When the candidate meets a condition, completion of the condition will be recorded on the relevant PPR or Confirmation of Candidature documents. Students who do not satisfactorily meet any condition of candidature by the due date will be invited to show cause as to why their candidature should not be discontinued.

APPROVAL AUTHORITY

Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation)

RESPONSIBLE EXECUTIVE MEMBER

Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation)

DESIGNATED OFFICER

Manager, Graduate Research School

LAST AMENDED

17 March 2021

STATUS

Active

2.2 Plan for Progress Reviews (PPR)

Plan and Progress Review (PPR) is the mechanism by which candidates and their supervisors develop and monitor and maintain a tailored research training program to achieve the knowledge, skills and learning outcomes provided in the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) for level 9 and 10 degrees.

2.2.1 The HDR Coordinator is the authority for determining the outcome of the plan and progress review and the Dean, Graduate Research is the authority for approving the project's budget.

TABLE 0.1

| PPR Outcome | Actions |
|----------------------|---|
| Exceeds Expectations | Academic progress is satisfactory, and the candidate is on track to submit subsequent milestones including thesis submission prior to scheduled milestone due dates. The next PPR is due within 6 months for international candidates, and 12 months for domestic candidates. |
| Meets Expectations | Academic progress is satisfactory, and the candidate is on track to meet subsequent milestones including thesis submission, by scheduled milestone due dates. The next PPR is due within 6 months for international candidates, and 12 months for domestic candidates. |
| Needs improvement | Academic progress does not meet expectations at this time and remedial actions are required. The candidate must undertake research and research training activities as specified by the supervision panel and approved by the Dean, Graduate Research. The next PPR must be submitted within 3 months to document remedial actions undertaken. A student has a maximum of 6 months from the initial Needs improvement outcome, to achieve an outcome of Meets Expectations, otherwise progress is deemed Unsatisfactory. |
| Unsatisfactory | The candidate will be invited to show cause as to why their candidature should not be terminated. Refer to section 6 for information on Response to Show Cause. |

2.2.2

Initial Plan and Progress Review

A candidate's HDR program will be planned in consultation with their supervision panel within the first two months of full-time equivalent candidature. The initial plan will include:

- a comprehensive research project plan with key project activities ;
- a project budget (including all required expenditure items for the project and candidature with all relevant funding sources);
- research training skills development activities (following assessment of the candidate's existing knowledge and skills to ensure achievement of the Research Graduate Attributes by completion of the program);
- a plan to achieve conditions of candidature and candidature milestones within the due dates;
- a publication and presentation plan (if applicable); and
- a supervision panel/student meeting schedule.
- a copy of the Research Data Management Plan

2.2.3

Subsequent Plan and Progress Reviews

After the initial plan development, candidates are required to undertake the planning and review process every six (6) months for international candidates and every twelve (12) months for domestic candidates. The frequency of PPR for each candidate is determined by the candidate and Principal Supervisor within the timeframes allowed following the outcome of the most recent PPR (refer to table 0.1).

In reviewing a candidate's plan and progress, the candidate, their principal supervisor and the HDR Coordinator will review progress made towards the project goals set in the previous PPR and update goals to reflect changes in the research project and recommend an outcome of the progress plan and review from the below table. They may additionally:

- review the previously approved project budget and attach a revised funding request if changes are required;
- discuss any gaps in the candidate's research skills or knowledge and identify appropriate training opportunities;
- consider whether the candidate is on track to achieve their next candidature milestone and identify any support or resources required;
- review and update the publication plan;
- review the Research Data Management Plan;

- record examples of feedback on the draft thesis, such as the independent reviewer’s feedback

2.3. Confirmation of candidature

This section should be read in conjunction with the Higher Degrees by Research Independent Academic Reviews – Guidelines.

2.3.1 Candidates are considered “probationary candidates” until they are approved as “confirmed candidates” via the confirmation of candidature process.

2.3.2 The confirmation process occurs within the following timeframes from the candidate’s commencement date in their HDR program:

| | ELIGIBLE TO APPLY | | PROBATION EXPIRY* | |
|----------|-------------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|
| | Full-time | Part-time | Full-time | Part-time |
| Doctoral | 3-12 months | 6-24 months | 18 months | 36 months |
| Master | 3-9 months | 6-18 months | 12 months | 24 months |

Candidates may apply for confirmation prior to the confirmation timeframe with the approval of their Principal Supervisor. All candidates must complete the confirmation of candidature process by the Probation expiry date. Candidates who have not submitted and or achieved confirmation by the probation expiry date will be invited by the Graduate Research School to show cause to the Head of Enrolling Unit as to why their candidature should not be terminated.

Where the Head of the enrolling unit is a candidate’s supervisor, or where another conflict of interest arises, then the show cause request will be delegated to another Head of School or more senior staff member to consider.

2.3.3 The purpose of this milestone is to ensure that:

- the candidate receives appropriate feedback in relation to the viability and progress of the research project;
- the candidate has enough training and that there are resources available to complete the program within the recommended timeframes; and
- composition of the supervision panel is appropriate.

The candidate is required to prepare a written research proposal for assessment by a review panel. The Principal Supervisor is required to apply text matching software to the candidate’s research proposal prior to submission for confirmation of candidature.

2.3.4 The review panel includes at least one independent academic reviewer. Refer to the Higher Degrees by Research Independent Academic Reviews – Guidelines for information on nominating the independent academic reviewer and the focus for their review.

2.4.5 Following feedback from the independent reviewer(s) the candidate is required to:

- a) prepare a response to the reviewer’s feedback;
- b) update their plan for the continuation of their research (refer to undertake the planning and review process outlined in section 2.2.3; and
- c) present their research proposal to the review panel in person or by video conference.

2.3.6 The review panel will provide feedback to the candidate on their research proposal as part of the confirmation process. Following the confirmation presentation, the Enrolling Unit’s nominated HDR Coordinator will determine the outcome as one of the following:

TABLE 0.3

| | Outcome | Actions |
|-----|----------------------|---|
| (a) | Exceeds Expectations | Candidature is confirmed, with the supervision arrangements confirmed and the thesis title approved. Academic progress is satisfactory, and the candidate is on track to submit subsequent milestones including thesis submission prior to scheduled milestone due dates |
| (b) | Meets Expectations | Candidature is confirmed, with the supervision arrangements confirmed and the thesis title approved. Academic progress is satisfactory, and the candidate is on track to meet subsequent milestones including thesis submission, by scheduled milestone due dates. Minor adjustments to the proposed research may be required which can be made during confirmed candidature (without the need for revision and resubmission of the written research proposal). |
| (c) | Needs Improvement | Candidature is not confirmed. The candidate is required to continue enrolment as a probationary candidate to revise the written research proposal and where applicable, to undertake further research work or training in accordance with the detailed feedback provided by the review panel. |

The candidate is required to complete revisions to the satisfaction of the review panel within the remaining period of probationary candidature.

If the candidate does not complete the confirmation process to the satisfaction of the review panel before probationary candidature expires, the candidate will receive a confirmation outcome of Unsatisfactory.

(d) Unsatisfactory

Where a candidate's application for progression to confirmed candidature is assessed Unsatisfactory, the Head of School or Head of School delegate will determine whether to:

(i) where judged to be appropriate, a probationary doctoral candidate may be offered the opportunity to be admitted as a confirmed candidate to one of the university's research Master degrees; or

(ii) invite the candidate to show cause as to why their candidature should not be terminated. Refer to section 21 for information on Response to Show Cause.

The enrolling unit submits the confirmation of candidature form and associated documents to the Graduate Research School for quality assurance and retention on the candidate's student record which is visible to the student and supervisor via USC Central.

2.3.7 The Dean, Graduate Research is the authority for approval for the operational budget associated with the candidate's confirmed research plan. Required adjustments will be returned to the enrolling unit.

2.3.8 A probationary candidate must be approved as a confirmed candidate by the Enrolling Unit's nominated HDR Coordinator before they can proceed with their Higher Degree by Research program.

2.4 Thesis Submission

Refer to the Higher Degree by Research Thesis Submission and Examination – Procedures for detailed information on thesis submission and examination.

Candidates must plan to submit a final draft of their thesis to the Principal Supervisor with enough time for the Independent Academic Review of the final draft thesis. Refer to the Higher Degrees by Research Independent Academic Reviews – Guidelines.

Final thesis submission is normally due after:

- 3 years full-time equivalent study for doctoral students; or
- 1.5 years full-time equivalent study for master by research students.

2.5. Final presentation

2.5.1 A candidate is required to present their research and HDR candidature experience at a seminar prior to completing their program. The presentation is intended to be a celebration of the candidate's research training journey. The content of the presentation may include (but is not limited to):

- a) the research conducted;
- b) their research training experience (e.g. development of the Research Graduate Attributes);
- c) reflections on their personal and professional development during their higher degree by research; and
- d) sharing the benefit of their experience with other HDR candidates.

2.5.2 The presentation may occur prior to the due date for thesis submission (but not more than 3 months before thesis submission) or following thesis submission while the candidate is awaiting the examination result (but must occur before the Dean, Graduate Research will recommend Conferral), whichever is best for the candidate.

2.5.3 Presentation at external conference(s) is not an accepted reason for exemption from the Thesis Seminar; however, all candidates will be encouraged to present their research to appropriate external audiences.

2.5.4. The candidate in liaison with the supervision panel and the enrolling unit, organises the time for the Thesis Seminar using the Presentation Planner online form.

2.5.5 Candidates must present a seminar to the satisfaction of the Enrolling Unit's HDR Coordinator before their program requirements can be considered complete. The enrolling unit reports the date of the final thesis presentation on the thesis submission forms and confirms completion of the requirement by providing feedback to the candidate on their presentation using the 'Presentation Feedback Form'.

2.5.6 The Graduate Research School confirms that this program requirement has been met before progressing with the recommendation to award a higher degree by research paperwork.

3. Milestone Extensions

A milestone extension delays the relevant candidature milestone due date within the maximum period of probationary or confirmed candidature. Candidates who wish to extend the duration of probationary or confirmed candidature must apply for an extension to candidature (see the Higher Degree by Research Candidature – Procedures).

3.1 Milestone extensions will only be approved where the candidate experiences events which have direct impact on the progress of research, and justification for the extension must be provided.

3.2 Where an extension is being sought, the extension request must be submitted to the Graduate Research School at least two weeks but not more than three months prior to the milestone due date.

3.3 Milestone extension requests may be approved by the Principal Supervisor.

4. Missed Milestones

4.1 Missed milestones are those which are not submitted by the due date and where an extension request has not been approved.

4.2 Missed milestones that have not been resolved within three months FTE for Doctoral candidates and 1 month FTE for Masters candidates following the due date indicate unsatisfactory progress and will result in the candidate being invited to show cause to the Head of Enrolling Unit as to why their candidature should not be discontinued.

Where the Head of the enrolling unit is a candidate's supervisor, or where another conflict of interest arises, then the show cause request will be delegated to another Head of School or more senior staff member to consider.

4.3 The Graduate Research School will monitor candidate's for missed milestones and will issue invitations to show cause accordingly.

5. Candidature Reviews

Candidature reviews are initiated by enrolling units (most commonly the Principal Supervisor) when a candidature is not progressing as expected and the candidate has not participated in a requested Plan and Progress Review. Candidature Reviews provides a mechanism for enrolling units to resolve abandoned candidature or unsatisfactory progress by discontinuing enrolment and subsequent accumulation of fee liability for the student.

5.1 Enrolling units are required to submit details of the candidate's circumstances leading to a review using the *Candidature Review* form.

5.2 Enrolling units are required to inform the candidate that a review of their candidature is being submitted to the Dean, Graduate Research.

5.3 Reviews that are being submitted due to the candidate not demonstrating satisfactory progress must include:

- a clear explanation of the progression issues and the reason for the recommendation;
- evidence to support the allegations of unsatisfactory progress, such as meeting notes, email exchanges, or academic work undertaken in the HDR program; and
- evidence to demonstrate how the enrolling unit has attempted to assist the candidate to improve their progress and address identified deficiencies.

5.4 Reviews that are being submitted due to the candidate no longer having a suitable supervision panel must include:

- a clear explanation of the circumstances that led to the candidate not having a supervisor; and
- evidence to demonstrate how the enrolling unit has attempted to appoint an alternative supervisor or assisted the candidate with locating an alternative supervisor.

5.5 Following receipt of a candidature review from an enrolling unit, the Graduate Research School will formally contact the candidate regarding the review and provide them with ten (10) working days to respond to the Head of Enrolling Unit.

SUPERSEDED DOCUMENTS

Higher Degrees by Research Confirmation of Candidature - Guidelines