

CONFIRMATION OF CANDIDATURE GUIDELINES



AUDIENCE

These guidelines have been prepared for Higher Degree by Research candidates, their supervisors, Confirmation Chairs, Confirmation Committee members and School staff. There are one set of confirmation guidelines for the university, with requirements specific to a School noted at the end of this document.

PURPOSE

These guidelines provide a minimum and consistent standard for the confirmation process for Higher Degree by Research (HDR) candidates. They should be read in conjunction with the [Code of Practice for Higher Degree by Research Candidature](#). Other supporting documentation includes the Candidate Cover Sheet and Confirmation Committee Evaluation Form; both of which are available by request from Graduate Research. The confirmation process is a very important milestone in the higher degree research program, which is undertaken to assess a candidate's capacity for completing the outlined research project within their HDR program. Candidates should consider it as an opportunity to share their research proposal with an expert audience outside of their supervisory team, who will evaluate their preparedness as a candidate and feasibility of the research project proposal.

PRINCIPLES

The confirmation process allows candidates to receive objective confirmation early in their candidature on matters such as their research direction being sound, the methodologies appropriate and the standard of writing satisfactory. Any difficulties that might impede successful completion can be identified and, if possible, addressed.

Candidates and supervisors are encouraged to view the confirmation 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.

In accordance with the Higher Degree by Research Policy candidates are required to satisfy the following requirements:

1. Present to the Confirmation Committee a written document containing at least:
 - a) A critical review of recent work in the field;
 - b) An updated research proposal;
 - c) An updated plan of research;
 - d) An updated timetable for completion of the thesis, and;
 - e) A comprehensive statement of the resources required to complete the project within the funded period.
2. Deliver an oral presentation to the Confirmation Committee, and;
3. Provide a verbal defence of the research proposal before the Confirmation Committee.

In addition, the issue of ethics and safety approvals, intellectual property, thesis format and components and data retention and management must also be considered and addressed. Off-campus candidates are required to participate in the confirmation process. The [Code of Practice for Higher Degree by Research Candidature](#) states that it is the responsibility of external and off-campus candidates to attend the campus at least twice each year for discussions with supervisors and for required activities. It is expected that the

confirmation review will be conducted in person, noting that confirmations may be held on our university campuses or arranged on Country through communication with the School. In exceptional circumstances, alternative arrangements such as a zoom conference may be arranged, noting that confirmations are not able to be recorded without prior consultation with Graduate Research.

If any accommodations to the confirmation process are sought by the candidate, this should be approved in writing by the Head of School/Deputy Head of School before the confirmation is arranged and the arrangement provided to the Confirmation Chair by the School.

If any agreements are requested by external parties, these need to be approved by Graduate Research before confirmation, noting that confirmation members should not sign agreements (such as commercial in confidence) that have not been reviewed by the University.

Candidates are provided with information on the confirmation process in their Letter of Offer. Further detailed information is available on the [website](#).

DETAILS

1. TIMING

The University of Newcastle requires Higher Degree by Research (HDR) candidates to undertake the confirmation process within twelve months of commencement of candidature on a full-time basis (or part-time equivalent). It is recommended that part time PhD candidates undertake confirmation within 18 calendar months.

To ensure that confirmation is completed within this timeframe, the first confirmation should be scheduled at around nine months (or part-time equivalent) to allow time to integrate formative feedback if a second confirmation attempt is required. Candidates may request to undertake confirmation earlier than nine months with the support of their supervisor/s and Head of School /Deputy Head of School and approval of the Dean of Graduate Research.

In exceptional circumstances, the Dean of Graduate Research will consider written requests to extend this period providing the Principal Supervisor and Head of School / Deputy Head of School support an extension.

Mandatory training modules are to have been undertaken by the time a candidate completes their confirmation, including the 12-week First Year Success Program, and other onboarding requirements outlined in the [Higher Degree by Research Procedure](#).

A thesis will not be accepted from candidates who have not met the confirmation requirement.

2. 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/s do not act as Chair or as a member of the panel.

The membership of the Committee should comprise of the following membership and is to be approved by the Head of School Nominee.

- 1st Chair: Confirmation Chair - selected by the School from the approved Register.
- 2nd member: Member of the School/discipline closely aligned with the research area.
- 3rd member: Academic or expert external to the School/discipline with related research expertise.

3. CONFIRMATION PROCESS

3.1. The School will coordinate the dates and venues for the presentation, appoint a Confirmation Chair and convene the Confirmation Committee.

3.2. The School will notify the candidate and supervisors of the confirmation details, including any changes to the confirmation date or venue.

3.3. The candidate will complete the cover sheet and submit their written proposal via the 'my confirmation' system in [myHub](#). Supervisor/s will complete their section of the confirmation submission in NUSTAR. This must be completed with sufficient lead time to allow the Committee members to read the documents prior to the confirmation, generally at least two weeks will be required.

3.4. The Chair will review the documentation and meet with the confirmation committee before the confirmation to ensure that the written document aligns with School expectations and there are no academic or research integrity issues that require referral under the [Student Conduct Rule](#).

3.5. 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 no longer than 15-20 minutes. The confirmation presentation style can be arranged through the School and may include options such as an electronic presentation with PowerPoint, a yarning circle or inclusion of an exhibition. The Chair will then convene the confirmation, with only the committee members, candidate and supervisors present.

3.6. The Chair will establish the 'ground rules' and ensure the process is outlined before commencing. The Chair will oversee the verbal defence, where the committee will ask questions to the candidate in order to clarify or extend on any aspects of their proposal or candidate preparedness. The supervisor/s may be in attendance but will not participate given that it forms part of the candidate assessment process. An opportunity will be provided after the verbal defense for the supervisors and for the candidate to address the committee.

3.7. The Committee will deliberate, review their findings and determine a recommended outcome. The Committee Chair is to provide the result and feedback to the candidate as soon as possible after the confirmation, ideally on the same day as confirmation. If the Committee requires additional clarification in order to determine the recommended outcome, the delivery of a recommended outcome by the committee to the candidate may be delayed by no longer than a week.

3.8. The Chair will ensure that the candidate is aware of the process for raising any concerns about the recommended outcome or process of the confirmation with the Head of School/Deputy Head of School and of any supports available, such as the Student Advocates and Student Support.

3.9. The Chair will record the committee evaluations, recommended outcome and feedback on the Confirmation Committee Evaluation Form in NUSTAR and submit the documentation to the Head of School/Deputy Head of School for review as soon as practicable after the confirmation.

3.10. Heads of School/Deputy Head of School will ensure that an appropriate level of feedback has been provided to the candidate, that the process and university policy have been adhered to and that a suitably documented recommended outcome is provided. If not satisfied by the process, the Head of School/Deputy Head of School can refer the record back to the Chair of the Committee to provide additional information and/or to address identified areas of concern. They will then make their determination on the confirmation and submit to Graduate Research for review.

3.11. Graduate Research will review the documentation and recommended outcome. They will then provide the candidate with notification of the formal outcome by sending the student and supervisor (cc. graduate-research@newcastle.edu.au) a copy of the confirmation documentation. Graduate Research will record the outcome on the student system. Where an international candidate receives an outcome that involves a second attempt at confirmation, Graduate Research will notify the relevant parties that a documented intervention strategy is needed in accordance with the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act. Where the confirmation process has not been followed, the Dean of Graduate Research may determine that another confirmation will be required.

4. 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. The Committee will need to meet with the candidate and supervisor/s separately to provide an opportunity to discuss the proposed transfer.

It is recommended that the confirmation process and the transfer process be combined. In such cases, the Confirmation Committee Evaluation Form must be received by Graduate Research in line with the HDR 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 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 (i.e.: PhD-Software Engineering 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.

5. OUTCOMES

There are three primary outcome categories. Schools 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 ensure they provide feedback in such cases 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 Research 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.

Note there is no opportunity to have a confirmation 'conditionally approved'. In the occasional case where the Confirmation Committee requires minor clarification, the recommended outcome may be held over for no longer than a week. The committee will be required to reconvene within this timeframe to provide the recommended outcome and feedback to the candidate. This short period should not be used in lieu of requiring a second attempt.

6. UNSUCCESSFUL CONFIRMATION ATTEMPT

If the Confirmation Committee determines that a second attempt is required, the Committee shall document the aspects of the confirmation criteria which were not met and provide written feedback to the candidate through the confirmation record. The candidate will then be required to undertake confirmation within three months. The candidate should be provided with appropriate support during this phase by the School.

If the Committee determines that the candidate cannot be confirmed, and hence recommend an outcome of *Not Confirmed*, the Committee must make a recommendation to the Dean of Graduate Research requiring the candidate to Show Cause to the Research Training Sub-Committee (RTSC) as to why their candidature should be permitted to continue. It is essential that the Confirmation Committee report is sufficiently detailed. In these cases the Confirmation 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 outlining the intervention strategies that were implemented.
- A statement of what other options, if any, have been discussed with the candidate (e.g. downgrade to a Master level program).

After consideration of the candidate's submission and the report of the Confirmation Committee, the RTSC may terminate the candidature or place conditions on continuation. The candidate may appeal the decision as detailed in the [Higher Degrees by Research Policy](#)

7. ROLES AND EXPECTATIONS

This section outlines the roles of those involved in confirmation. The points expand out the confirmation process and some of the expectations for those participating, and provides links to relevant rules, policies and guidelines.

Candidates:

- Are to read and understand the requirements and process as set out in these guidelines and in the [Code of Practice for Higher Degree by Research Candidature Policy](#).
- Where applicable, are to read and understand the [Research thesis with a creative component procedure](#) as well as the [Thesis Examination Guidelines](#).
- Are to comply with their obligations as set out in the [Student Conduct Rule](#).
- Where applicable, are to read and understand the issues and complete relevant mandatory training related to:
 - [Intellectual Property](#)
 - [Ethics and Safety](#), and;
 - [Data Retention](#).

Note: Students who will handle animals during their research program must complete the Code and Animal Research Ethics (CARE) modules prior to confirmation and must provide a copy of the certificate of completion with their written documentation.

- Are responsible for the completion of their candidate coversheet and submission of their proposal online using the 'my confirmation' system in [myHub](#).
- Will deliver their presentation to the Confirmation Committee within their School in a public forum. Candidates will then provide a verbal defence of their research to the confirmation committee, noting that supervisors will attend but do not participate. It is important to note that the committee is assessing the candidate, not the supervisors.
- May be asked to provide the Committee with additional detail or clarification. In this case the delivery of a recommended outcome by the committee may be delayed by no longer than a week.
- May contact the Head of School / Deputy Head of School in writing within a week of receiving the recommended outcome to request a meeting if there any concerns about the process of the confirmation.
- May draw on supports from the University, such as the Student Advocates or Graduate Research, who can provide advice about university policies and processes.

Supervisors

- Are to be aware of the process and the possible confirmation outcomes, noting that the first confirmation is an opportunity for the candidate to receive formative feedback from the committee to improve their proposal, and that often a second confirmation will be needed for the candidate to demonstrate they meet all confirmation criteria that are being assessed.
- Will liaise with School Convenor to suggest possible members for the confirmation committee, noting that the Chair will be allocated by the School.
- Will engage with their candidate about the requirements, ensure they have the best opportunity to be confirmed in their degree and complete the supervisor section of the confirmation record in a timely manner.
- Are expected to attend their candidates' confirmation to provide support to their candidate, noting that supervisors do not participate in delivering the presentation or in the verbal defence of the proposal.
- Will maintain confidentiality around the confirmation process, including not discussing the confirmation outside of the process until the formal outcome is provided.
- Will act in a professional manner, understanding that the avenue to bring forward concerns about the process or recommended outcome is to advise the Head of School / Deputy Head of School within a week of receiving the confirmation committee's verbal recommended outcome.
- Will not share confirmation documents with other candidates unless the work has been published and written permission is provided by the School.

Schools: Heads of School / Deputy Heads of School

- Will ensure that information sessions are provided to candidates and supervisors on a regular basis to provide information about the confirmation process.
- Are responsible for overseeing timely scheduling of confirmations for all candidates within their School, including ensuring that processes are in place to keep candidates and supervisors informed of any changes to confirmation dates or venues.
- Will arrange for confirmation presentations to be held in an open forum, with other HDR candidates and academics in the discipline encouraged to attend (noting that second confirmation presentations may be presented only to the committee rather than in an open forum).
- Will ensure that Confirmation Chairs selected from the University Confirmation Chair Register and that it has been made clear that the confirmation will adhere to the guidelines and align with university policy.
- Will arrange to meet regularly with all confirmation chairs to ensure a flow of information regarding updates to processes and to share information regarding any concerns raised around confirmation.
- Will ensure processes provide sufficient advance notice to candidates to allow for finalisation and submission of their confirmation documents and presentation.
- Will ensure that confirmations are arranged in a fair and equitable manner, noting that supervisors are not to Chair or to be a member the Committee.
- Will be available to meet with the candidate and/or supervisors to discuss concerns about the process of the confirmation if advised in writing within a week of the confirmation, taking into consideration any identified concerns before making the School recommendation.
- Will review and sign-off on the completed confirmation documentation and forward to Graduate Research with their recommendation, noting that conditional confirmations are not accepted and that issues such as incomplete training need to be addressed before the endorsement.
- Will not act as a Chair or be a member of a confirmation committee within their School given their role in overseeing the process.

Confirmation Chair

- Will be required to be nominated by the Head of School as a Confirmation Chair. A central register of Confirmation Chairs will be maintained, with the requirement for Graduate Research to ensure that the Register is maintained and that the Chair has undertaken training on an annual basis.
- Will be members of the Professoriate with an outstanding track record in Principal Supervision and of high standing in their field (noting that in smaller Schools senior lecturers with an excellent record in supervision, expertise in their field and experience in administrative roles may be nominated)
- Will oversee appointment of members of the committee and be satisfied that any conflicts of interest are identified and managed in accordance with university policies and processes.
- Will review the documentation and meet with the committee members before the confirmation to ensure that documentation is appropriate and that members are aware of the expectations during confirmation in regard to role and process.
- Will ensure that any potential allegations, such as academic, ethical, safety or research integrity matters, are identified before the confirmation so they can be referred to the Head of School/Deputy Head of School if needed. The confirmation process will be paused if an allegation requires investigation according to university policies and processes.
- Will welcome the participants in the confirmation and provide an Acknowledgement of Country. They will outline the confirmation process, including the role of the confirmation committee, possible outcomes and avenues for any concerns about the process.
- Will provide suggestions and critique to candidates within the confirmation as part of the committee's evaluation, noting this may be recorded in the confirmation feedback (even when a specific criterion has been assessed as being met).
- Will ensure that any deliberations or clarifications are finalised and that the recommended outcome is communicated with the candidate and supervisors (in person) within a week of the confirmation taking place.
- Will record the committee evaluations, recommended outcome and feedback on the Confirmation Committee Evaluation Form and submit the documentation to the Head of School/Deputy Head of School for their attention.

Committee Members

- Will assess whether the candidate has met the criteria for confirmation; including consideration of the written proposal, oral presentation and verbal defence. Under the direction of the Chair, committee members may ask questions of the candidate in order to determine if the candidate has met each of the criteria being examined.
- May seek to address the candidate or supervisors, together or separately, before making their determination.
- Will check that mandatory training, including CARE training if applicable, has been completed.
- Will deliberate and put forward a recommended outcome, noting that the Chair will be responsible for determining the feedback and advising the candidate of the recommended outcome.
- Will act at all times in a professional manner in alignment with university policy and processes, adhering to the direction of the Confirmation Chair.
- Will maintain confidentiality around the confirmation process, including not discussing the confirmation outside of the process until the formal outcome is provided.
- If external to the University, will provide written advice in a timely manner as requested by the Confirmation Chair for upload to the NUSTAR confirmation system.

Graduate Research

- Will keep a central Confirmation Chair Register and provide annual training to ensure Chairs are updated on policies and processes.
- Will assist the School confirmation organisers with questions around confirmation, noting that at times there may be issues with the NUSTAR system and forms may be required in lieu of the online record.
- Will review the confirmation documentation, noting that further information may be requested from the School if any concerns are identified. If it is determined that the confirmation process has not been followed, the Dean of Graduate Research may require the confirmation to be undertaken again.

- Will provide formal notification of the outcome to the School, candidates and supervisors and ensure that the outcome is recorded.
- Will provide data to Schools on a regular basis regarding confirmation due dates, noting that Schools should be actively managing scheduling of confirmations.

8. GENERAL INFORMATION

- The confirmation written document will generally be a maximum length of 10,000 words with 1.5 line spacing (not including references or appendices). Font style should be reasonable for the reader to read the thesis on a screen. Styles such as Arial and Times New Roman, size 12, are commonly used. The title page should include the thesis title, the candidate's name, student number and email address and the names and contact details of all Supervisors.
- Liaise with your supervisors and School about any detail to assist in preparing your confirmation document. Note that the **School of Biological Sciences** has a specific format required. There is also additional information available for candidates from Schools for projects with a creative component.
- An Originality Report is usually required through Turnitin - please contact your School for more details.
- Instructions on how to upload documents to myHub can be found via the following link: [Confirmation-Candidate-User-Guide.pdf](#). Please ensure the document uploaded is the final and correct version - the system will only allow one submission. Upload all additional documents at the same time or select the "Save Draft" button. Once the "Submit Final" button has been selected, you will not be able to submit further documents. Contact your School if you have difficulties with the system.
- Once the Principal Supervisor has signed-off on your uploaded Document, the Document will be circulated to the Confirmation team for their review prior to your Confirmation.
- The oral presentation should be 15-20 minutes in total and you should be prepared to answer questions from the audience on the presentation. Candidates are able to liaise with their supervisors and the School regarding the presentation, noting that it may comprise different styles such as a yarnning circle, PowerPoint, or include a creative component such as an exhibition. The presentation does not need to include all the information contained in your written Confirmation Document, but should include the following:
 - A clear statement of the overarching research problem
 - A justification for the need for this research, including a critical summary of previous literature in the area
 - A clear statement of the specific research objectives and hypotheses
 - An outline of your proposed thesis
 - Detailed descriptions of the research methodologies
 - Discussion of progress to date – including the results /learnings from any previous pilot work
 - A brief timeline
- Consider that the presentation is to a wider audience and candidates will need to consider with supervisors the information that should be included to ensure the protection of novel ideas that have not been published; any commercial in-confidence agreements and other considerations such as intellectual property.
- At the end of the Presentation the audience may ask a few questions – note this is not the verbal defence which will be undertaken by the Committee (without an audience)
- If you have any questions or concerns regarding this process, please contact your School HDR contact or Deputy Head of School/Head of School.