

CONFIRMATION OF CANDIDATURE POLICY FOR UNE DOCTORAL STUDENTS

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Implementation Date

Background

This policy will control the formal completion of the probationary phase of a doctoral student's candidature. While a number of UNE doctoral students in the formative stage of their candidature have a strong sense of direction, are highly motivated and perform well, the progress of others is problematic. The confirmation process attempts to assess formally the extent to which students are 'on track' during the early period of their candidature and consequently, whether or not their candidature should be extended. In this sense, the policy comprises an integral part of the University's quality assurance processes.

The specific aims of the policy are to:

1. Identify early in students' candidature any support and guidance necessary for their proceeding successfully to the next major stage of their research;
2. assess progress to date and the academic preparedness of the candidate to complete their degree (or course);
3. provide an opportunity for the candidate to demonstrate written and other necessary research skills appropriate to the doctoral level of study; and
4. achieve more timely and successful completions.

Process

The Confirmation process will need to be explained to all new doctoral students early in their candidature, including those who upgrade from masters to doctoral level. At these sessions, students will need to receive information about the support available to them during their candidature as indicated in relevant documents (eg. the Gold Book). Importantly, they will need to know about the Confirmation process involving the seven required tasks to be completed in the given timeframe, the composition of the Confirmation Panel and how it will conduct its business, and acknowledge the role of Confirmation of Candidature as a major milestone in their research candidature. Panel members will be required to sign off when the student has undergone the induction process.

For doctoral programs of 3 years duration, student progress will be assessed at 6 months after enrolment for full-time students and at the 12 month period for part-time students. For students in 4 year programs or professional doctorates that require coursework, assessment would normally be carried out 6 months after work on the thesis or portfolio has begun for full-time students and at 12 months after work on the thesis or portfolio has begun for part-time students.

In order for candidature to be confirmed the following tasks or milestones must normally be met by candidates. Candidates are required to have:

1. presented a detailed research proposal for formal approval within the first 6 months of candidature for full-time students and within the first 12 months for part-time students;
2. completed an annotated bibliography or literature review if not included in proposal;
3. applied for ethics approval where relevant;
4. passed safety course where required;
5. completed successfully any required coursework units;
6. completed other approved development activities needed – e.g. units in statistics, academic writing, intellectual property and electronic literacy including use of electronic databases; and
7. presented their progress to date at an interview with the Confirmation Panel (an interview without the presence of the Principal Supervisor will also be available to students).

These may need to be adapted according to specific School requirements. Any School specific requirements should be provided to the student early in their candidature.

A Confirmation Panel, an advisory body, will be set up for each candidate comprising:

- The Principal Supervisor
- The School HDR coordinator or Head of School nominee who will act as Chair;
- A representative from the student's disciplinary area nominated by the Principal Supervisor or Head of School; and
- A representative who is there at the invitation of the student (optional).

Panels may co-opt additional expertise as required for each candidate.

The Confirmation Panel will recommend either that:

- a) candidature is confirmed (with possibly some conditions applying); or
- b) candidature is not confirmed on the basis that progress is unsatisfactory.

Only when candidature is formally confirmed, may the student progress to the next stage of their research.

Unsatisfactory Progress

Where progress is deemed by the Panel to be unsatisfactory, the student will be given the opportunity to respond to a 'show cause' letter from the Dean of Graduate Studies. Students must respond to the Dean of Graduate Studies within 21 days of receipt of the letter.

The Higher Degree Research Committee will review the show cause correspondence, will notify the student of the Committee's recommendation, and in the case of an unfavourable decision, inform the student of the appeal process.

The decision on unsatisfactory progress is final, barring the exercise of the right of appeal (see below). The Higher Degree Research Committee will provide a recommendation to the Academic Board to implement that decision.

Appeals

- a) Students will have the right of appeal against any unfavourable recommendation of the Higher Degree Research Committee. The formal appeal must be made in writing to the Secretary of the Higher Degree Research Committee within 21 days of the receipt of the advice of the unfavourable recommendation.
- b) Appeals will be permitted on procedural grounds only. Procedural grounds for appeal may include:

- i. procedural irregularities in the conduct of the Confirmation process; and
- ii. documentable evidence of prejudice or bias on the part of one or more of the members of the Confirmation Panel.