

MELBOURNE SCHOOL OF POPULATION HEALTH GUIDELINES FOR CONFIRMATION OF PHD CANDIDATURE

Effective from 1 July 2011

Confirmation is a key milestone in PhD candidature. The confirmation process is to determine whether or not work to date by the candidate on the PhD research project demonstrates a strong likelihood that it will result in a high quality thesis, completed in the required time. The Melbourne School of Population Health Guidelines for Confirmation of PhD Candidature are to be read in conjunction with the information in the Melbourne School of Graduate Research PhD Handbook: <http://www.gradresearch.unimelb.edu.au/current/phdhbk/candidature.html#confirmation>

1. What is confirmation of PhD candidature?

PhD candidates, except those who have converted from a Masters degree by Research, or in some cases, have transferred from enrolment in a research higher degree at another institution, are first admitted as 'probationary' candidates. Probationary candidature is for a minimum of 9 months and a maximum of 12 months (or 18 and 24 months for part-time candidates) except where an extension is approved officially. The Melbourne School of Graduate Studies sends a Confirmation Report form to the candidate after 8 months (full-time) probationary candidature. This signals the commencement of the Confirmation process.

2. What is the purpose of confirmation?

The purposes of Confirmation are to:

- Determine whether the candidate has developed a clearly defined, coherent and feasible research project
- Assess the progress of the project to date and the academic preparedness of the candidate to complete the research, including:
 - The student's capacity to operate at high level of scholarship
 - The adequacy of supervisory panel and advisory committee support (e.g., an additional panel or committee member might be suggested to address an identified need);
 - Whether there are gaps in the candidate's knowledge/skills (e.g. methods) that make completion of a high quality thesis unlikely
- Assess whether the proposed research is of high quality and will make a significant original contribution to the field of study,
- Enable the Confirmation Committee to contribute suggestions for the successful completion of the PhD;
- Gain peer feedback on the project;
- 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;

- Acknowledge publicly a major milestone in the PhD process and inform others about the research.

3. What is the process of confirmation?

The confirmation process involves submitting a written report followed by an oral presentation.

The oral presentation:

The oral presentation will be for 30 to 40 minutes. It will be followed by questions from the audience and then a meeting with the Confirmation Committee during which further questions will be addressed to the candidate. The content of the oral presentation should include a brief background to the topic, the aims of the research and key research questions, the proposed methods of the research and a report on progress to date. The oral presentation is to be advertised at least two weeks in advance through notification of the Executive Assistant to the Head of the Melbourne School of Population Health. It will be a public seminar open to attendance by the School and University community as well as members of the candidate's Confirmation Committee.

The written report:

The purpose of the written report is to show that the candidate is able to:

- Read and understand the relevant literature;
- Critically appraise the literature;
- Frame and justify a research question;
- Propose and justify appropriate research methods to address the question;

Some requirements for the written paper will vary between Melbourne School of Population Health Centres and disciplines, but for all candidates it must include:

A Confirmation/Progress Report of up to 3,000 words covering:

- A brief summary of the background and context of the research and its significance;
- A statement of the research question(s) and aims;
- Methods to be used to address the research question(s);
- Ethical issues that need to be considered in conducting the project and whether approval by an ethics committee has been obtained or will be required;
- Progress to date;
- Proposed timeline to completion;

The audience for this 3000-word report should be the Melbourne School of Population Health community. Additional Centre-specific requirements, if any (described below), may be targeted or pitched to a different audience, by agreement between the student

and his or her Supervisory Panel. Any additional material must be appended to the 3000-word report (and be distinguished by a clear section break), and must be limited to 7000 words maximum as detailed in the following paragraph.

At the discretion of the Centre or Supervisory Panel, students may be required to submit additional material of up to 7000 words. This could be a literature review, an examination of the theoretical background to the research, a draft paper for publication, or draft thesis chapters. The Melbourne School of Graduate Research policy is that Confirmation Reports are between 3,000 and 10,000 words in length (i.e., total report length not to exceed 10,000 words).

The candidate and her/his Supervisory Panel should discuss and agree upon the format and length of the Confirmation Report when the confirmation process commences (see Checklist provided at the end of this document to facilitate this process).

The Confirmation Report should be submitted to the supervisory Panel and Confirmation Committee two weeks in advance of the oral presentation.

4. The Confirmation Committee

The Confirmation Committee is the candidate's Advisory Committee and includes the candidate's supervisors, a senior member of the Centre's academic staff and usually an external expert in the field. The Confirmation and Advisory Committees are chaired by a senior academic appointed by the Head of the Centre where the candidate is enrolled. After the oral presentation the Confirmation Committee meets with the candidate to discuss the project, seek further clarification of questions raised after the presentation and any issues arising from the written report. During the discussion, the Confirmation Committee will assess the feasibility and resource requirements of the proposed project and offer suggestions towards its successful completion. The discussion will also cover the candidate's learning needs and any problems encountered during probationary candidature. An opportunity will be provided for the candidate to discuss the adequacy and level of supervision received either with the Committee or with the Chair of the Committee without the supervisors being present.

For further information on the distinction between Supervisory Panels and Advisory Committees (both required for all RHD students), please see the policy guidance on the School website at:

http://www.sph.unimelb.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0007/161683/MSPH_Supervision_Panels_and_Advisory_Committees.pdf

5. How does the candidate prepare for confirmation?

The supervisor(s) will discuss what confirmation entails from the commencement of probationary candidature. This will include discussion of:

- The membership and purposes of the Advisory Committee, who serve as the Confirmation Committee;
- The structure and content of the oral presentation and written report;
- Practical arrangements for advertising the presentation and booking the room;

Supervisors should ensure that an opportunity is provided to rehearse the presentation if required.

6. What are the next steps for PhD candidature to be confirmed?

The Confirmation Committee has to assess whether the progress of the candidate is sufficient to produce a high quality PhD thesis in the timelines of the candidature. The Confirmation Committee will make a recommendation to:

- Confirm candidature
- Extend the probationary candidature to a specified date with specified requirements to be achieved in that time;
- Convert candidature to a Masters by research, or
- Terminate candidature.

7. Confirmation Checklist

A Confirmation Checklist has been developed by the School's Higher Degree Research Committee and is appended to this document. This checklist for confirmation preparation was developed to address two aims: clarifying the steps and requirements in the process to both students and supervisors, and building consistency in the confirmation process across the School.

8. PhD Handbook

The current PhD Handbook is also a valuable resource for confirmation and all other aspects of candidature. The 2011 version is available at:
<http://www.gradresearch.unimelb.edu.au/current/phd/bk/>

Melbourne School of Population Health PhD Confirmation Checklist

This checklist aims to ensure that both the PhD candidate and primary supervisor are aware of their responsibilities with respect to PhD confirmation. The primary supervisor is to complete the checklist with the PhD candidate 3 months prior to the anticipated confirmation date. Please tick to confirm where indicated.

Candidate name:	
Anticipated data of confirmation:	
Name of supervisor completing this checklist:	
Date of completing this checklist:	

The supervisor has discussed the Guidelines for Confirmation of PhD Candidature with the candidate:

Membership of Confirmation Committee discussed:

Confirmation Committee members	To be contacted by whom?

Structure and content of written confirmation report:

Length of confirmation report is up to 3000 words, not counting appended materials:

Confirmation report should include a brief summary of the background and context of the research and its significance:

A statement of the research question(s) and aims:

Methods to be used to address the research question(s):

Ethical issues that need to be considered in conducting the project and whether approval by an ethics committee has been obtained or will be required:

Progress to date:

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Other confirmation report requirements as per Centre (*specify*): _____

Structure and content of oral presentation discussed:

Room booking to be made by whom? (*specify*) _____

Discussed advertising the confirmation:

Signature of PhD Candidate	Signature of supervisor

One copy of signed checklist to be kept by PhD candidate, one copy to be kept by supervisor on the candidate's file.