CONFIRMATION OF CANDIDATURE GUIDELINES

Overview
UQ research higher degree candidates progress through a milestone and development based system. The three milestones are

1. confirmation of candidature,
2. mid-candidature review, and
3. thesis review.

Normally, research higher degree candidates at the University of Queensland are initially admitted as ‘provisional’ candidates. Exceptions may be made in some cases for those who have transferred from MPhil to PhD, or from confirmed candidature at another institution.

Confirmation of candidature is a critically important moment in every research higher degree candidature for the academic development of the candidate, reviewing resources for the school, and quality assurance for the university.

At this time, the candidate receives formative advice about the direction, scope, planning, and feasibility of the project; the school reviews the resources that are needed to sustain the candidature (the advisory team, technical support, physical and financial resources), compliance with relevant university, disciplinary, and external regulatory protocols; and the university is assured by the school’s review that a continuation of the candidature is likely to lead to an examinable thesis in about the 3-4 years full-time for a PhD, and 1-2 years full time for a MPhil, for which the student, the school, and the university are funded.

The Confirmation of Candidature guidelines, together with copies of associated documentation, are given to candidates enrolling through the School of Civil Engineering at the commencement of their studies and are also available on the School’s website (http://www.civil.uq.edu.au/current-research-higher-degree). This information should be read in conjunction with information provided by the UQ Graduate School (http://www.uq.edu.au/grad-school/completing-each-milestone).

Timing of Confirmation of Candidature

- PhD candidature is due after the standard period of 12 months full time enrolment (FTE) and 24 months part-time (PTE) enrolment.
- MPhil candidature is due after the standard period of six months full time enrolment (FTE) and 12 months part-time (PTE) enrolment.
Extension of Provisional Candidature

- If the candidate has not attempted the school confirmation process, the Confirmation Committee may recommend that the period of provisional candidature be extended (normally for a period of three months FTE) on the following grounds:
  - the topic (or approach or methodology) has changed;
  - preliminary data collection has been unavoidably delayed;
  - other relevant circumstances have arisen.
- Only one such extension is possible. Confirmation cannot be extended for these reasons if the candidate has already received an extension of provisional candidature. If the candidate has commenced the school confirmation process but the confirmation committee cannot recommend confirmation at this time, the confirmation committee may recommend that the period of provisional candidature be extended to a specified date (normally for a period of three months FTE, but periods of up to six months may be more appropriate in certain cases).
- Any recommendation to extend the period of provisional candidature must be made using the Attainment/Extension of Milestone form providing written advice outlining why candidature cannot be confirmed at this stage, what is required to achieve the appropriate quantity and quality of work, and the date by which it must be presented to the Confirmation Committee for consideration.
- Further information on extension or termination of candidature is available on the University’s Graduate School website.

Responsibilities & Administration

- The candidate should allow at least six weeks notice for preparation of written and oral submissions with the expectation that the advisory team will provide feedback on the writing of drafts of the confirmation document.
- During the preparation period it is important that candidates liaise with their advisory team and to discuss any special requirements. The purpose of the Confirmation of Candidature process/review is to ensure that research is going to plan, to identify any problems that may be impeding progress, and to give advice on how these may be overcome. It should not be seen as an examination, but should be viewed as a developmental exercise, designed to maximise the likelihood of successful completion of candidature.
- The principal advisor is responsible for nominating/organising the:
  - composition of confirmation committee including the chair of the confirmation committee (see below);
  - date/time/venue for review and seminar at a time suitable for both confirmation committee and candidate.
- When the seminar and review dates/times/venues have been organised (the candidate may be asked to assist) and particulars of the confirmation committee are known, the principal advisor or candidate is requested to email rhdadmin@civil.uq.edu.au with:
  - notice of these arrangements;
  - any special requirements for the review;
  - in some cases whether there is likely to be a transfer from MPhil to PhD.
Confirmation Committee

- A Review Committee of at least three members of the School must be appointed for each candidate, essential members being:
  - Chair of Review Committee (a suitable academic not involved in candidate’s research);
  - Advisory team (the appointment of an associate advisor must be made by Milestone 1);
  - at least one member of staff who is not a member of the Advisory Team and who has expertise in the general area of the thesis project,
  - a representative student member is optional.

- In the event: the candidate does not agree with the confirmation committee’s assessment, if there are major differences remaining regarding any aspect of the project, and/or major resource questions need to be addressed, then these matters should be communicated to the School Postgraduate Coordinator for resolution as soon as possible.

Components of the Confirmation

- **Written component**
  To assist the confirmation of candidature committee, the candidate is requested to provide written submissions on the following, at least two weeks prior to the scheduled review:
  - aim of study
  - literature review (approximately 30 pages)
  - summary of any work so far
  - research plan and timetable.

  The rationale for the written submission is to demonstrate to the committee that the candidate is clear about the objective of the project, that they have read, understood and critically reviewed previous work on this topic. It is intended that the work prepared will form part of their final thesis and so this should not be regarded as an additional task, rather an opportunity to bring thoughts together.

- **Oral presentation**
  The candidate will be expected to give an oral presentation to an appropriate group of disciplinary peers for the purpose of receiving expert and constructive advice about the proposed project, its scope and feasibility and the appropriateness of the theoretical approach, methodology and/or experimental design. This will put the research topic in context, outline progress to-date and indicate a plan for completion.
• **Interview**
  The following agenda, which may appear unnecessarily formal, does allow for an open and honest exchange:
  - seminar (20-25 mins)
  - discussions with whole confirmation committee
  - discussions with the candidate in the absence of the advisory team
  - discussion of committee in absence of the candidate
  - committee recommendations

  It is expected that a number of issues that may affect the candidate’s studies will be raised by the committee for discussion. This is also an opportunity for the candidate to raise any concerns and issues with regard to their studies. Following discussions, the confirmation committee will make recommendations about the candidature.

**Documentation**
On conclusion of the review process the principal advisor is requested to forward the *Attainment/Extension of Milestone* form together with the *Confirmation of Candidature - Evaluation report* to the Postgraduate Administrative Officer for processing.

**Possible issues to be raised in the review**

**Scientific**
- suitability of the topic for the program
- candidate understands the objectives of the project
- adequacy of the candidate’s scientific/engineering knowledge
- research techniques appropriate for the project
- adequacy of candidate’s technical skills

**Project Management**
- availability/access to facilities/equipment/maintenance funds
- adequacy of project plan and achievement of goals
- access to/interaction with advisors

**Coursework**
- relevance of completed coursework
- future courses to be undertaken

**Organisational**
- satisfactory scholarship/visa
- adequacy/availability of funding
- adequacy/quality of supervision
- other remarks/actions
  - written English
  - spoken English
- timetable constant with progress
CRITERIA

Problem Summary
- What is the problem?
- How important is it?
- What has been done previously?
- What ‘is’ or ‘will be’ the student’s contribution?
- What is the value of this contribution?

Objective
A short statement stating the achievable objectives of the thesis - this is the most important element in the thesis proposal. If the objectives are not clearly written and achievable, the thesis usually ends badly.

Literature Review
The candidate is required to critically review previous work in their chosen field. This means synthesis of the data i.e. comparison with other work and theory done on the same basis. This would include:
- How your work compares with the previous work?
- What is the accuracy and reliability of the previous work?
- What are the limitations of the previous work?
- Where does the existing knowledge lead you?
- What is missing?
- What are you going to provide?

Approach
You will need to provide a detailed discussion of how you intend to accomplish your objective:
- theory necessary to interpret the results
- experiments necessary to obtain your results
- assessment of the accuracy and reliability of your results
- description of the analytical work, analyses and interpretation of the results.

Work Plan
An overall plan giving a block diagram illustrating activities and outcomes – this plan needs to document the planned experiments.

Schedule
The schedule has two parts:
- A short description of tasks.
- Chart of the task schedule e.g. Gantt chart (if applicable)