

School of
civil engineering

Milestone Guidelines



THE UNIVERSITY
OF QUEENSLAND
AUSTRALIA

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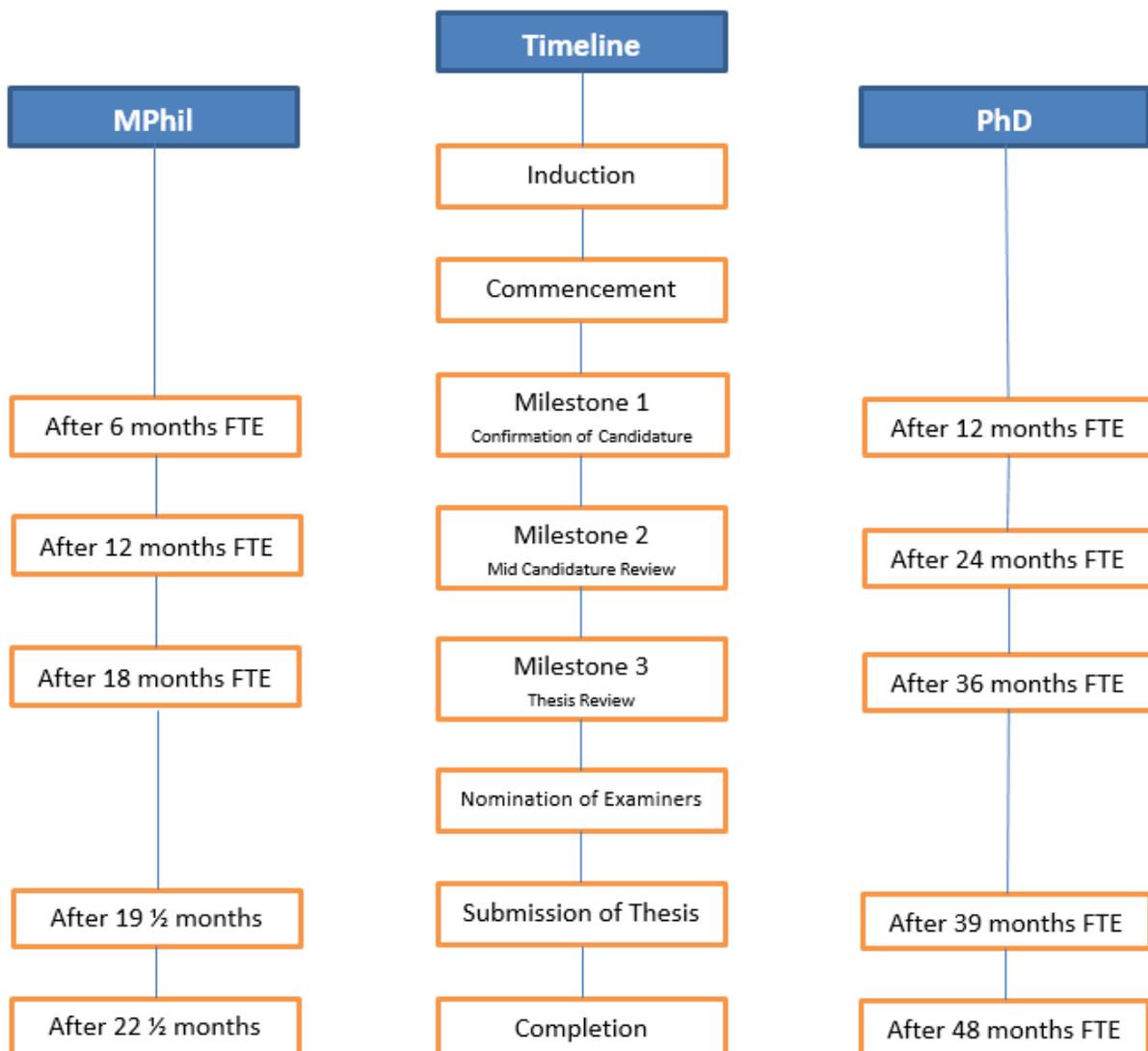
Milestones

UQ research higher degree (RHD) candidates progress through a milestone, or development based system. The three milestones are:

*Milestone 1: Confirmation of candidature,
Milestone 2: Mid-candidature review, and
Milestone 3: Thesis review.*

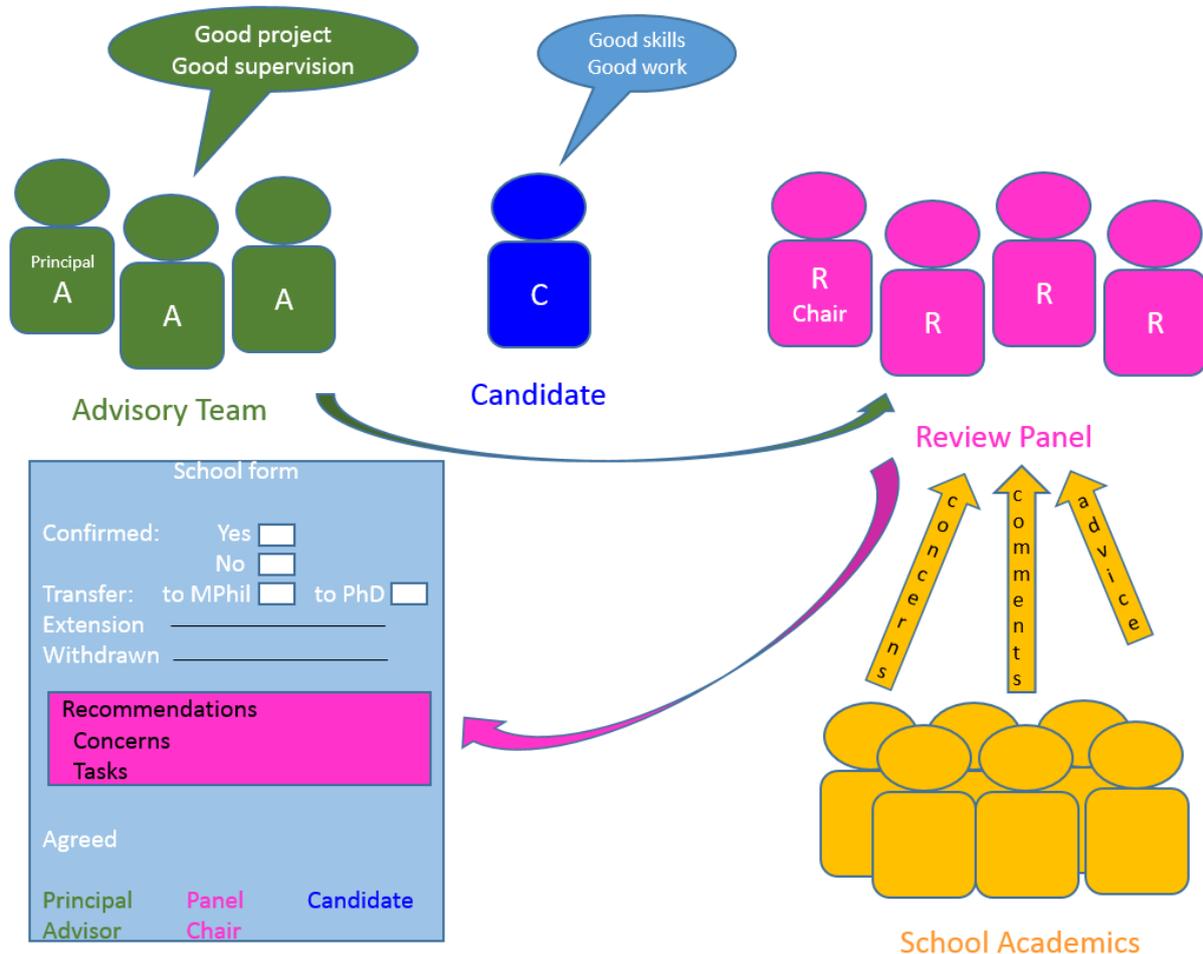
At each milestone, the candidate receives formative advice about the direction, scope, planning, and feasibility of the project; the School reviews the resources that are needed to sustain the candidature (the advisory team, technical support, physical and financial resources); and the University is 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 candidate, the School, and the University are funded.

The purpose of the milestone reviews are 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.



*FTE is Full Time Enrolment

The participants in the Confirmation process and their roles are illustrated in the picture below. There is no compulsory involvement of the School staff broadly at Mid-Candidature- and Thesis- Review milestones. The confirmation needs to be publicly announced, and School staff are strongly recommended to attend the confirmation seminar.



The principal advisor and associate advisor(s) form the Advisory Team and are involved in all major milestones.

Review Panel

A Review Panel of at least three members must be appointed for each candidate. The review panel is involved in all major milestones. Essential members are:

- The Chair: a School academic, who is not on the advisory team, who has suitable seniority and discipline insight to be able to act with integrity in formulating the panel's recommendations.
- at least one member of staff who is not a member of the Advisory Team but who has expertise in the general area of the thesis project,
- a representative student member is optional
- discipline experts external to the School are optional

Components of a Milestone

At each milestone, the Review Panel makes an assessment based on:

- ***Written Report produced by the candidate***

To assist the milestone Review Panel, the candidate provides a written submission at least two weeks prior to the scheduled review. The report is to demonstrate that the candidate has critically reviewed previous work, addressed any tasks set at a previous milestone, and has a clear picture about the objective and direction of the project. The report is sent to the Postgraduate Coordinator and the Postgraduate Admin Team as well as to the Review Panel.

- ***Oral Presentation to the School***

An oral presentation pitched to the broad School audience is mandatory at Confirmation. The broad School audience is encouraged to attend and offer advice. All of the specialists from the discipline area of the project (Structural & Fire, Geotechnical & Mining, Water or Transportation) are expected to attend the confirmation presentation. At the other milestones, oral presentations may or may not be requested by the Review Panel.

- ***Interview with Review Panel and Advisors***

All milestone sessions include an interview with the Advisors and the Review Panel, which may take the form of the Q&A session after an oral presentation.

In addition, at Confirmation, there is an interview session between the candidate and the Review Panel, without the Advisors.

Time Management & Administration

The candidate should allow at least six weeks' notice for preparation of the written and oral submissions for Milestone 1, with the expectation that the advisory team will provide feedback on drafts. Less preparation time will be required for Milestones 2 and 3.

During the preparation period it is important that candidates liaise with their advisory team and discuss any special requirements.

The principal advisor is responsible for:

- nominating the Review Panel for approval by the Postgraduate Coordinator. If possible, the review panel should remain the same for all milestones. This can be indicated on the milestone evaluation form.
- organising a date/time/venue for review and seminar two weeks before the confirmation session.

At least two weeks before the review, the principal advisor, or the candidate, is requested to email the Postgraduate Administrative Team with: review date/time/venue and particulars of the Review Panel, any special requirements for the review and, if relevant, whether there is likely to be a transfer to/from MPhil from/to PhD.

Review Panel Evaluation

The Review Panel considers many factors when evaluating a candidate's milestone components. Some of these are:

	Confirmation	Mid-candidature review	Thesis review
Project	Is there an appropriate scope for an RHD degree?	Is it proceeding on plan, and still of suitable scope for an RHD degree?	Is the content and plan of the thesis clear? Has a realistic and timely date been agreed, and is it justified?
Resources	Is appropriate funding, infrastructure and supervision in place?	Are funding, infrastructure and supervision still in place and adequate?	Are funding, infrastructure and supervision still in place and adequate?
Candidate	Does the Candidate display appropriate research skills/potential and drive?	Do they show evidence of skills/knowledge, and ownership of project?	Are they committed to and capable of a timely submission and completion?
Progress	Has a suitable quantity of quality research been completed? Has the candidate completed any courses? Or should some coursework be undertaken?	Are they advancing and on track for the completion of a high-quality project?	Is the scope, quantity and quality of completed original research satisfactory? Has consideration been given to the choice of Thesis Examiners?

The milestone documentation completed by the Review Panel should summarise:

- the strengths, achievements and developmental needs of the candidate,
- decisions made about resources, scope and overall direction of the project and
- suggestions towards the successful completion of candidature. This may take the form of specific tasks that need to be undertaken before, and reported to the Panel at, the next milestone session.

Documentation

The Review Panel delivers its assessment through:

- School Evaluation form; and
- Attainment of Milestone webform; or
- Extension of Milestone webform.

On conclusion of a milestone review process, the Chair of Review forwards the appropriate documents to the School Postgraduate Admin Team for checking. The candidate will then be asked to submit the document to the Graduate School via the RHD Candidature Portal.

Extension of a Milestone

If a candidate cannot attempt a milestone by the due date as listed in the RHD Candidature Portal, they can request an extension on the following grounds:

- the topic (or approach or methodology) has changed;
- preliminary data collection has been unavoidably delayed,
- other relevant circumstances have arisen.

Milestone due dates are normally extended for a period of three months FTE for PhD candidates. MPhil candidates need to advise the duration of the extension. MPhil candidates have a maximum of 4.5 months FTE of extension permitted for the entire candidature, allocated at the discretion of the candidate and advisory team.

If a candidate has commenced a milestone process but the Review Panel cannot recommend attainment at this time, the Panel may recommend an extension 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 RHD Candidature Portal, providing a written explanation on the extension requested, what is required to achieve the appropriate quantity and quality of work, and the date by which it must be presented to the Review Panel for consideration.

Only one such extension is possible.

Further information on extension, withdrawal or suspension, changing between full-time and part-time, and review or termination of candidature is available on the University's Graduate School website (<http://www.uq.edu.au/grad-school/>).

Milestone 1: Confirmation of Candidature

Normally, RHD 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 confirmed candidature at another institution.

Confirmation is a critically important moment for every research higher degree candidate. At this milestone:

- the candidate receives formative advice about the direction, scope, planning, and feasibility of the project; and about the acquisition or further development of appropriate research and professional skills;
- the School reviews the human, physical, and financial resources needed to sustain the candidature, in compliance with relevant University, disciplinary, and external regulatory protocols, and
- the University is assured by the School review that continuation of the candidature is likely to lead to a thesis that will be of a suitable standard and quality for assessment in about the period for which the candidate, School, and University are funded to support the candidate's enrolment.

Timing: 9-12 months (FTE) after commencement for PhD, 4-8 months (FTE) for MPhil.

School expectations for PhD and MPhil Confirmation

The expectations for the PhD and MPhil are similar, except that the volume of research work for the MPhil is smaller, in proportion to the expected duration (1-2 years versus 3-4 years), and that a greater level of supervisory guidance is expected, than for the PhD.

Work to be completed between admission and confirmation of candidature

Written work	
Scope	<p>Critical Literature Review of the relevant background, field report (if applicable) and specific engineering related document. The document should be of professional quality, with the expectation of not having technical or grammatical errors.</p> <p>The report must contain a declaration of the intended scope of the thesis work, and a plan for the work, which needs to be done to complete the thesis.</p>
Word limit	No more than 8000 words should be used for the main report. At least 10 richly illustrated pages are appropriate. There is no word limitation of additional information in form of appendices.
Quality expectations	<p>The confirmation report is expected to demonstrate a comprehensive grasp of the state of the art related to the project.</p> <p>Equally, the planned contribution to the research field internationally and/or professional practice must be clearly conveyed.</p> <p>Writing quality and report presentation is expected to be similar to final dissertation or publication.</p>
Timing	To be submitted to the Review Panel via the School's PGO two weeks before oral presentation and confirmation interview.
Assessment process	The Review Panel reads the report before the oral presentation and may direct questions about the report to the candidate at this session.
Oral work	
Accepted formats	<p>Formal presentation to the Review Panel and members of the School.</p> <p>An invitation, with the confirmation report attached, is emailed to all School academics at least one week before the confirmation session.</p>
Duration	Presentation is usually 25 minutes with open questions following the presentation.
Quality expectations	<p>The principal quality expectation is that candidates convey the objectives and study methodology for their research clearly and concisely and show how it relates to existing knowledge.</p> <p>The presentation format should be similar to a conference presentation but pitched to the School-wide audience.</p>
Assessment process	The Review Panel provides written feedback to the candidate on the School Evaluation form.
Interview/Dialogue	
Participants	The Review Panel and the Candidate
Purpose	The Review Panel can ask the Candidate about the supervisory arrangements and/or the candidate may raise concerns about it.
Timing	Immediately after the oral presentation.
Written Feedback	
Format	The School Evaluation form, which contains a list of specific achievements that must be met by the mid-candidature review. If confirmation is extended, tasks to be done and goals to be achieved within the extension period are set and provided to the candidate.

Milestone 2: Mid-Candidature Review

The mid-candidature review represents a mid-point between confirmation of candidature and thesis review milestones. Achievement of this milestone reassures the candidate, advisory team and School that:

- the project is on track for completion within candidature duration, and
- the candidate's research and other professional skills are developing appropriately.

Timing: 9-12 months (FTE) after confirmation for PhD, 4-8 months (FTE) for MPhil.

School expectations for PhD and MPhil mid-candidature review

Written work	
Accepted formats	Short statement (between 2-4 pages) addressing the expected achievements by mid-candidature review and an updated work-plan towards completion of the thesis. In addition, the candidate must address any tasks set out on the School Evaluation form at confirmation. The advisory team may provide feedback on drafts before submission.
Timing	9-12 months after confirmation and 1-2 weeks before mid-candidature review.
Assessment process	Review by the Review panel.
Oral work	
Accepted formats	Interview with the advisory team and the Review Panel. The Review Chair can request a formal oral presentation.
Written Feedback (Compulsory)	
Format	The School Evaluation form which contains a list of specific achievements that must be met by the thesis review. If this phase is extended, goals to achieve within the next 6 weeks to 3 months are set and provided to the candidate.

Milestone 3: Thesis Review

The thesis review:

- enables the Review Panel to determine that the thesis should be ready for assessment by the expected date or determine a new submission date;
- allows any differences of opinion among the candidate and the advisory team about the readiness of the thesis for assessment to be aired and settled;
- identifies any major concerns that need attention before submission;
- provides a forum for discussing the mix of disciplinary knowledge required among the thesis examiners to review the breadth of work contained within the thesis; and
- enables the candidate and the advisors to express any reservations or concerns about having any particular individual act as an examiner.

In addition to matters normally covered by feedback and recommendation documents, the thesis review feedback attests the quality and scope of the research, details decisions reached about the mix of thesis examiners, records reservations about particular individuals, and states the expected thesis submission date.

Each candidate is required to submit a written report summarising the current state of research. The candidate's Review Panel will review the report, and may request further information. This could take the form of either (1) further written work, (2) an oral presentation by the candidate, or (3) an interview/dialogue with the candidate. The Review Panel, in all cases, will provide written feedback to the candidate. The Review Panel also indicates if the candidate has passed the milestone, and if not, what tasks are required in order for the candidate to pass the milestone

Timing: 12 months after mid-candidature and 2-4 months (FTE) before thesis submission and 6 months after mid-candidature and 4-8 weeks (FTE) for MPhil.

School expectation at Thesis Review for PhD and MPhil

Written work	
Accepted formats	Short statement (no more than 5 pages) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describing the progress since the mid-candidature review • addressing any tasks as set out on the School Evaluation form at the time of mid-candidature review • a detailed thesis table of contents, a draft thesis abstract • the proposed submission date, and any comments on potential thesis examiners
Oral work	
Accepted formats	The Review Chair may request a formal presentation
Interview/Dialogue	
Participants	Candidate, Advisory team, Review Panel
Written Feedback	
Format	The School Evaluation form. If this phase is extended, goals to achieve within the next 6 weeks to 3 months are set and provided to the candidate.

Appendix

Possible issues to be raised in the reviews

Scientific

- suitability of the topic for the program
- candidate's understanding of 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 consistent 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 does your work compare 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:

- What theory is necessary to interpret the results?
- What experiments are necessary to obtain your results?
- How will you assess the accuracy and reliability of your results?
- What are your plans? Provide a 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)

Advisory Team

The Advisory Team is comprised of a Principal Advisor, and one or more Associate Advisors. The members of the Advisory Team should discuss with each other and the candidate the distribution of advisory duties among the team so that the candidate has a clear understanding of whom they should consult about particular aspects of their research and their candidature. Soon after the establishment of the advisory team or after any changes to its composition, the candidate and all members of the advisory team should meet to discuss:

- the level and kind of assistance that may be provided by each advisor, and
- how differences of opinion about the direction of the research or the content of the thesis will be resolved.

Associate Advisor

Associate Advisors assist the candidate and the other advisors in the candidate's progress towards the successful completion of the research higher degree program. They provide relevant expertise that enhances the candidate's research work, or a particular part or aspect of it and they may provide the candidate with professional, community, international, or interdisciplinary links.

Normally, the School appoints an Associate Advisor (or advisors) when recommending a candidate for admission to candidature, however the appointment of a suitably qualified associate advisor must be made by Milestone 1: Confirmation of candidature

Candidate

Any student enrolled in an MPhil or PhD (RHD) program through the School.

Chair of Examiners

The Chair of Examiners is an internal reviewer with relevant general academic expertise in the area of research of which the thesis forms a part. The Chair provides assurance at several points during the assessment process that academically appropriate action is taken on the recommendations made by the external thesis examiners. The Chair does this by:

- reviewing the candidate's corrected thesis and ensuring that all recommendations made by the examiners have been appropriately incorporated into the thesis or their absence defended, and
- if requested, providing advice to the Dean of the UQ Graduate School about the Dean's preliminary view of the outcome of the thesis assessment, based on a review of the recommendations in the examiners' reports.

Chair of Review Panel

The Chair of Review Panel is a suitable academic not involved in the candidate's research who contributes to the review process. The Chair may also act as Chair of Examiners.

Induction

Inductions should be completed prior to commencing study as it is a means of providing information to new candidates. It also provides an opportunity to complete required paperwork.

Postgraduate Coordinator

The Postgraduate Coordinator (PGC) is an experienced senior member of the academic staff of the School who acts as the Head of School's delegate in making academic, administrative and (in some instances) resource decisions across the range of disciplines covered by the School. The Coordinator advises the Head on all research higher degree matters.

Postgraduate Administration Officer

The Postgraduate Administration Officer (PGAO) is usually the first point of administrative guidance and advice for prospective and current candidates. The Officer assists in administering aspects of student candidature such as leave, milestones and assessment, and maintains the School's student files and records.

Principal Advisor

The Principal Advisor guides and facilitates the research work of the candidate; provides the principal intellectual engagement with the candidate's research topic and its development; and monitors the quality of the work and assures the University (and, through it, the wider academic community) that the quality of the work is appropriate to the degree for which the candidate is enrolled, meets the research protocols appropriate to the discipline, and complies with all appropriate ethical, regulatory, and procedural requirements. The Principal Advisor also ensures that the candidate meets all academic requirements of the program; and ensures that all relevant parties are kept informed of the candidate's current academic progress and of any relevant personal, academic, technical, or resource-related issues that may affect their progress.

Review Panel

The Review Panel (or Review Committee) is comprised of at least three members of the School who are appointed for each candidate. The essential members are:

- Chair of Review Panel (a suitable academic not involved in candidate's research);
- 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
- discipline experts external to the School are optional

Thesis Examiner

The Thesis Examiner assures quality to the University and to the research community and adds pedagogical value to the research experience of the candidate. The examiner has several roles:

- to ensure that the work is of high quality;
- to benchmark the work against standards that apply in other leading institutions;
- to assure the University that the work complies with the appropriate research protocols in the field of study;
- to certify that the work in the thesis is original, and
- to provide an expert written response to the candidate's work that indicates not only its strengths and weaknesses, but also makes suggestions for further research and for its publication.

Individual examiners must either hold a degree of a level equivalent to or greater than the one the thesis is being assessed for, or have an outstanding record of demonstrated research ability and performance plus previous experience as a thesis examiner at a level equivalent to or greater than the one the thesis is being assessed for. All examiners must be external to the University.

Three Minute Thesis Presentation

It is expected that all candidates in the School will participate in the Three Minute Thesis competition (3MT®) at least once during their candidature. The competition involves entrants presenting a compelling three-minute oration on their thesis topic and its significance in language appropriate to an intelligent but non-specialist audience.