CONFIRMATION GUIDELINES

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Related Documents

Regulation 11

Higher Degree by Research Policy

Support for Students Policy

1. Overview

1.1 The Confirmation process is a critical step in the candidature of a higher degree by research student. It is the first major assessment of the candidate's work after admission and provides an early opportunity for monitoring progress towards satisfactory completion.

1.2 The Confirmation process seeks to examine four main things:

a) That the candidate has been able to identify and articulate a research question sufficient to develop a thesis argument apposite for the degree programme in which the candidate is enrolled;

b) If a doctoral project, that the research question and consequent argument display an original research topic or perspective on a topic and/or on an existing body of academic literature (by 'original' is meant that the work is the candidate's own research, that make a recognisable contribution to the field of research by providing a new perspective and insight on the material and/or methodologies for engaging with it; and communicates new knowledge);

c) That the candidate has been able to demonstrate that appropriate progress has been made in the project suitable to the length of candidature to that point in time;

d) That the scope of the research project is such that it can be managed within the projected time of the candidature.

1.3 It is also important to ensure that the supervisors are in a position properly to support the candidate in engaging on the particular research project.

1.4 The regulatory provisions governing the Confirmation process are found in the Determinations to the relevant Regulation located on the University website. These Guidelines explain how these provisions are administered.

2. Timing of the Panels

2.1 Panels are arranged throughout the year towards the end of the two semesters full time equivalent for doctoral candidates and towards the end of one semester full time equivalent for Masters by Research candidates. The dates of the Panels are arranged by the School of Graduate Research, and normally take place online unless otherwise

specified.

3. Documents to be Submitted

3.1 Six weeks prior to the beginning of the confirmation period, a candidate applies for confirmation of candidature by emailing to the School of Graduate Research a completed Panel Request Form.

3.2 Three weeks prior to the beginning of the confirmation period, the candidate submits via email to the School of Graduate Research the following materials:

    a) A statement of the research project question and thesis. (The material requires the articulation of a *single* and *focused* research question and thesis argument which serves to drive the research project, even if that question/argument requires multiple and complex ways of description and critical analysis. Moreover, it should demonstrate the originality of the thesis, typically with regard to the available scholarship.)

    b) A thesis or research proposal that identifies and explains the research methodologies involved in the project. (This should not be exactly the same proposal as that which had been submitted for admission to the programme – the Admissions Group admits candidates and their projects on the basis of perceived *potential*; and the proposal for Confirmation purposes should demonstrate the research reflection appropriate for the length of time of the candidature to that time.)

    c) An indicative bibliography.

    d) A chapter-by-chapter outline

    e) a timeline for the project's progress and completion.

    f) A sample of writing from the thesis or research project up to 10,000 words in length (including notes) (doctoral candidates, or candidates seeking upgrade to a doctorate); or up to 5,000 words in length (including notes) (masters candidates). (Tactically, it is most useful to develop not the introductory or background material, but to engage with material that will articulate the heart of the thesis. This can include a critical survey of the relevant literature. This material needs to demonstrate to the Confirmation Panel the operation of the relevant research skills and the documentation, therefore, should be carefully vetted for typographical errors, the employment of a fitting reference system, appropriate use of source materials, conformity to the University of Divinity's style guide, and so on. The material submitted should be polished to the extent suitable for a sustained examination by the Panel.)

3.3. Examining Readers are to produce a written report and to submit it to the School of Graduate Research **four days prior to the Confirmation Panel meeting**. Readers' reports will be made available to the candidate in written form before the Panel.

4. Composition of the Panel

4.1   The Determinations for the Regulation governing each research award require that "Confirmation of candidature is assessed by a Confirmation Panel comprised of three members:

   a)   the Dean of School of Graduate Research or delegate as Panel Chair; and

   b)   two persons with relevant expertise appointed by the Dean of School of Graduate Research." These examining Readers are research active academics or have appropriate industry experience where the project allows for industry examination. The Dean of School of Graduate Research seeks four suggestions for examining Readers from the Principal Supervisor.

4.2   The candidate's Primary Supervisor should attend the Panel meeting unless the candidate requests otherwise. The candidate's Research Coordinator and Associate Supervisor may attend the Panel meeting unless the candidate requests otherwise.

5. Structure of the Panel Meeting

5.1   The normal structure of the process is as follows:

   a)   Candidate's oral presentation (10 mins) – the candidate will speak for no more than 10 minutes in order to deliver a well-prepared oral reflection on matters such as the nature of the project, its goals, methodologies, or required source materials. The objective is to direct the Panel to the most important elements of the submitted documentation. The oral presentation should not detract from the quality of the application for confirmation and may enhance it.

   b)   The examining Reader 1's reflections (10 mins) – the Reader will indicate the main issues or areas of concern, if any, and should invite the candidate to respond to suggestions and questions;

   c)   The examining Reader 2's reflections (10 mins) – as above

   (Reminder Note of 3.3: Readers are to produce a written report and to submit it to the School of Graduate Research **four days prior to the Confirmation Panel meeting**. Readers are very much discouraged from reading the report verbatim.)

   d)   Chair's reflections (5-10 mins) – as above in b);

   e)   Research Co-ordinator's reflections (5 mins) – as above in b);

   f)   Principal Supervisor's reflections (5 mins) – as above in b);

   g)   Associate Supervisor's reflections (5 mins) – as above in b);

   h)   Candidate and Supervisors, and possibly the Research Co-ordinator, are invited to leave the room while the Panel deliberates (10 mins);

   i)   The Supervisors may be invited to return in order to discuss the supervision process;

   j)   The Candidate is invited to return in order to learn of the Panel's decision;

   k)   The Dean of School of Graduate Research subsequently provides the

recommendation in written form to the Candidate, Supervisors, and Research Co-ordinators.

5.2   Panels should normally be 60-90 minutes long.

6.   Decisions of the Panel

6.1   The Confirmation Panel must make one of the following decisions and the School of Graduate Research reports that decision to the Research Committee in writing:

a)   That the candidate is making satisfactory progress and candidature is confirmed; or

b)   That the candidate be directed to revise and resubmit part or all of the application materials within six weeks of the date of the Confirmation Panel meeting, after which the Confirmation Panel may confirm candidature; or

c)   That the candidate be directed to reapply for confirmation of candidature by a further Confirmation Panel no later than six months after the date of the meeting; or

d)   That the candidate is at risk of making unsatisfactory progress and that a Course Progress Panel be convened for the purpose of determining if candidature should be discontinued in accordance with the Course Progress Policy;

provided that the Confirmation Panel may only make a decision under c) if the candidate has not previously applied for confirmation of candidature.

6.2   If the Confirmation Panel's decision is b) or c) above, it must detail the measures which would lead to successful confirmation of candidature. These measures may include:

a)   revision or resubmission of part or all of the application materials;

b)   changes to supervision arrangements;

c)   an intervention strategy in accordance with the Course Progress Policy.

If the candidate does not resubmit satisfactory materials or reapply for confirmation of candidature within the prescribed time frames, the Confirmation Panel may refer the candidate to a Course Progress Panel in accordance with the Course Progress Policy.

Disclaimer: Please note that the Panel examines the adequacy of the thesis proposal and the accompanying documentation against what is appropriate for this, and not the final thesis submission for examination, stage of research.