

Progress Review and Confirmation of Research Candidatures Procedure

Policy Hierarchy link	Conditions for Award of Doctor of Philosophy Policy Conditions for Award of Master of Philosophy Policy		
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Contact Officer	Director, Graduate Research School		
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1. Purpose and Scope

This procedure outlines the processes for independent progress review and confirmation of research candidatures. It applies to all research candidates, supervisors and positions responsible for management of higher degree research (HDR). The relevant Conditions for Award Policy should be read in conjunction with this procedure.

2. Definitions

Research Progress Review. These are formal, independent reviews that are conducted according to these University procedures. They include Annual Progress Reviews (APR),

Confirmation Reviews (CONFR) and additional interim reviews. Reviews are not intended to replace regular meetings and evaluations of progress that supervisors normally conduct.

Confirmation of Candidature. This is the result of a formal review that is conducted within the first year of a PhD program. Confirmation indicates that the research candidate has demonstrated to an independent panel that they have developed a feasible research program appropriate for PhD level qualification.

Show Cause. A candidate may be asked to show cause as to why their candidature should not be terminated in cases where there has been unsatisfactory research progress. Show cause is a process that provides an opportunity for the candidate to raise any issues that may have affected progress. These may include but are not limited to personal, technical and academic issues. Candidates may also be asked to show cause in cases of lapsed candidatures.

3. Procedure

All part-time and full-time research candidates must have their research progress reviewed by an independent panel at least once per calendar year throughout their candidature. More frequent reviews may be conducted if required.

3.1 Review intent

The intent of a research progress review is to provide candidates:

- an opportunity to have their research and supervision arrangements reviewed by a panel that is independent of the supervision and the conduct of the candidate's research project
- affirmation of their progress, where satisfactory progress has been achieved
- a safe environment in which they can raise any issues they feel are impacting on research progress, and
- support in developing a research plan and milestones for the period up to the next review.

3.2 Review process

- (i). The process for conduct of reviews may vary with the discipline, size of the School and attendance mode of the candidate. In general, a review should have:
 - a formal seminar presentation
 - a separate panel review meeting in which the candidate is given an opportunity to meet with the review panel alone.
- (ii). Although a seminar presentation may not always be required, development of presentation skills by candidates is an important part of research training and the APR is an ideal opportunity to practise these skills.
- (iii). The expectation is that supervisors will be available for the panel to interview. If either the candidate or the supervisors are not able to attend the review, alternate methods such as video-conferencing can be used if all parties agree and it can be supported by the School.
- (iv). Faculty/School specific confirmation and annual review guidelines should be clearly documented and provided to candidates during Faculty/School induction.

3.2.1 Panel composition

- (i). Each candidate will have a review panel (hereafter called the Panel) appointed by the Postgraduate Research Coordinator (PGC), to conduct the progress review.
- (ii). The Panel must be able to provide an independent and objective review of the candidate's progress. Typically, panel members should be qualified at least at the qualification level that the candidate is attempting. The Panel should be composed of a minimum of two members including:
 - a panel chair who is either the PGC or a senior member of academic staff who holds a continuing appointment at UNSW and has experience in supervision of research students to completion, and
 - at least one other member who holds an appointment equivalent to UNSW academic level B or higher.

- (iii). The same panel members should be maintained for reviews of a candidate throughout their candidature wherever possible.
- (iv). The Panel must not include:
 - the supervisor, co-supervisor or joint supervisor
 - more than one member who is an early career researcher
 - more than one member external to UNSW.
- (v). The candidate and supervisor should be informed of the Panel membership prior to the review. Any issues regarding the Panel composition including reasons for objections to the composition will be recorded.
- (vi). The PGC will be responsible for determining whether there is justification for exclusion or inclusion of specific members and whether to continue with the review or reconstitute a panel in the near future.

3.2.2 Initiation of reviews

- (i). The Graduate Research School (GRS) will inform each PGC in the mid-semester period of the names of all candidates who are due for an APR or a CONFR. The PGC should set review dates and ensure the APR form is available to the candidate.
- (ii). If an interim review is required as a result of an APR or CONFR, the PGC initiates the review.
- (iii). For all other interim reviews, the person requesting the review (if it is not the PGC) should justify the review by stating the reasons for the review in writing to the PGC.

3.2.3 Responsibility for conduct of reviews

The PGC is responsible for scheduling and running all formal research progress reviews as outlined in the Roles and Responsibilities of Postgraduate Research Coordinators Guideline. This includes providing appropriate discipline specific guidance to candidates on documentation required to support the review.

3.2.4 Responsibilities of the candidate

The research candidate is responsible for disclosing any information they feel is pertinent to their progress. This includes any personal issues and issues relating to supervision. If a candidate is not comfortable raising these issues in the review, or if independent support is required for other reasons, they are encouraged to access appropriate support services (see Section 4).

3.2.5 The annual progress review (APR)

Re-enrolment in each year of a research degree is conditional upon undergoing an APR prior to the relevant census date.

Key aspects include:

- (i). **Review documentation.** The candidate should complete the review form as well as provide appropriate additional documentation as requested by the PGC.
Any additional documentation and material presented in seminars should incorporate sufficient detail to allow the Panel to assess the research and its progress.
In addition to any Faculty/School specific requirements, the candidate should provide in writing:
 - An outline of achievements for the past 12 months against agreed objectives/criteria and milestones
 - An outline of key objectives/criteria and milestones for the next 12 months
 - A timeline and milestones for completion of the thesis
 - Where appropriate, a table of contents for the thesis together with the completion status of each section.

The Supervisor should also complete the review form and ensure that other members of the supervisory team are given the opportunity to make comments.

It is important that any issues considered to have impeded progress are flagged by the candidate and/or supervisor on the form including, but not limited to, personal, technical and academic issues.

- (ii). **Progress of the research.** This should be assessed with respect to the period elapsed since the last progress review and the agreed milestones. The first progress review held should be conducted against milestones agreed by the candidate and the supervisor in the early stages of the candidature. Where progress has not been satisfactory, any mitigating factors raised should be considered.
- (iii). **The respective roles of the supervisory team.** Roles should be clearly articulated to the Panel and the Panel should be satisfied that expectations are clear, that supervisors are fulfilling their roles and responsibilities and that effective communication exists between all parties.
- (iv). **Infrastructure and resources.** The review should assess whether these are adequate and appropriate for the research and whether any additional skills or development are necessary.
- (v). **Intellectual property, OHS, ethics.** Relevant policies should be understood by both candidate and supervisors and confirmation given that they are being appropriately implemented.
- (vi). **Personal problems and issues.** Where any personal issues, including health related issues are identified by the candidate and/or the supervisors on the review form or during the review process, the panel must ensure that these are followed up with the candidate and that the candidature is managed appropriately by the PGC/Head of School or, if necessary, the Associate Dean Research (or equivalent) or the Dean of Graduate Research.
- (vii). **Research plan and milestones.** Plans should be developed either for the period up to the next review or for completion.

3.2.6 The confirmation review (CONFR)

- (i). PhD candidates and Masters level candidates requesting a transfer to the PhD program require a CONFR.
- (ii). For PhD candidates, the CONFR should be scheduled 6 to 9 months (full-time equivalent) from the census date of the semester in which they commenced. It must occur at least 3 months prior to the census date (either March 31 or August 31) that marks the completion of the first full-time equivalent year of enrolment.
- (iii). For Masters level candidates, transfer to enrolment in a PhD degree requires that the candidate is qualified for admission to the PhD and that candidature is confirmed as part of the APR. Alternatively, if the request for conversion to a PhD degree does not coincide with the annual review schedule, an additional review may be arranged for confirmation of candidature.
- (iv). A CONFR must include the elements of an APR as detailed in 3.2.5 (i) to (vii) and must also address the following:
 - evidence that a well written and critical review of the research area (typically a literature review) has been drafted
 - an established and feasible, detailed research proposal.
- (v). Satisfactory progress is required in order for the candidature to be confirmed.
- (vi). The confirmation period may be extended for the purpose of holding an additional interim review. The full confirmation period may not be extended beyond fifteen months for full-time PhD candidates or thirty months for part-time candidates. This equates to three full-time equivalent months after the census date marking one year of enrolment. This timing does not apply to masters level candidates requesting to transfer to a PhD (see 3.2.6 (iii)).

3.2.7 The interim review

An additional interim review may be scheduled as a result of an APR or CONFR or may be called by the PGC, supervisor or candidate. The role and conduct of this review, including any required milestones must be made clear in writing to the candidate, either via the Progress Review form or via other documentation.

3.3 Review outcomes

3.3.1 Responsibility for implementing review outcomes

The PGC is responsible for coordinating implementation of the review outcomes recommended by the Panel. If additional advice is required, the Associate Dean Research (or equivalent) or the Dean of Graduate Research may need to be consulted. All milestones and remedial actions required should be discussed with the candidate and confirmed in writing.

3.3.2 Review recommendations

The Panel recommends one of the following outcomes at the completion of a review:

- (i). **Satisfactory.** A satisfactory recommendation signals that the panel considers that progress against milestones over the period since the last review or since commencement has been satisfactory. A satisfactory CONFR also signals that the research is appropriate for a PhD program and that the candidate has demonstrated critical review of the field.

In the case of an interim review, a satisfactory recommendation indicates that all of the issues raised in the previous review have been satisfactorily addressed. Overall, a satisfactory recommendation confirms that the Panel considers that the research is on track for a timely completion and that re-enrolment is permitted. A set of milestones should be produced for the next scheduled review.

- (ii). **Marginal.** A marginal recommendation suggests that although some of the milestones set were met, there are others that have been partially achieved or have not been achieved. New milestones should be set that detail remedial actions and the dates by which they should be achieved.

In the case of a Marginal CONFR, the new milestones must include detailed plans to meet confirmation requirements and the date by which this should be achieved.

Re-enrolment is permitted, but requires the candidate to work towards meeting the remedial milestones set. A date for an additional interim review must be scheduled between 1 and 3 months following a marginal recommendation.

- (iii). **Unsatisfactory.** Unsatisfactory recommendations are a serious review outcome that reflect poor progress of the research and suggest the candidature is at risk of non-completion. An unsatisfactory recommendation from a CONFR may suggest that the candidate is not suited to undertaking a research degree at the current time. Detailed milestones should be set and remedial actions developed to address the key factors identified as impeding progress. Specific dates by which milestones must be achieved should be set.

Re-enrolment is permitted, but requires the candidate to work towards meeting the remedial milestones set. An interim review must be scheduled for no later than 6 months following the unsatisfactory outcome.

3.4 Procedure for following up marginal and unsatisfactory outcomes

- (i). Where progress is judged as marginal or unsatisfactory, the most important roles of the panel are to:
- determine the key factors that have impacted on research progress
 - provide advice to the candidate on how they may address these factors and how they might overcome any issues raised in the review, including issues with supervision
 - facilitate development of a plan with the candidate and supervisor designed to assist the candidate in achieving satisfactory progress of the research, and
 - recommend the candidate be required to show cause if previous remedial action following an unsatisfactory outcome has been unsuccessful.

3.4.1 Non-research related issues

- (i) Where non-research related issues are considered to have impacted progress, candidates should be advised to seek appropriate support such as that outlined in Section 4.
- (ii) Candidates may be advised to transfer from full-time enrolment to part-time enrolment or to apply for leave if personal issues are protracted. This will allow time

for management of the non-research related issues and will minimise the impact on their research candidature.

3.4.2 Process for follow up of reviews

Appendix B outlines the process for following up reviews.

- (i). Following a Marginal outcome, there are only two recommendations that can be made at an interim review - Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory/Additional interim review. If the progress is judged Unsatisfactory in an interim review following a Marginal review outcome, then the process following an Unsatisfactory outcome must be followed.
- (ii). Following an Unsatisfactory/Additional interim review outcome, there are only two recommendations that can be made at the interim review – Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory/Show cause.
- (iii). If at any review the supervisor or the Panel recommends transfer to a Master degree, the candidate should be informed in writing of the reasons for this recommendation. If the transfer recommendation is accepted program transfer should be conducted via the Variation of Candidature Procedure.

3.4.3 Candidate appeal against a review outcome

If candidates wish to appeal against a panel recommendation or any recommended actions, they must have the opportunity to make a written submission to the Faculty Higher Degree Committee (hereafter referred to as the Committee). This should be submitted via the PGC within 10 working days from the date the school publishes the review recommendation. If there is a conflict of interest or other issue, the candidate may submit documents via the appropriate Faculty Associate Dean or via GRS. If required, appropriate avenues for support are available as outlined in Section 4.

3.5 Show cause as part of an unsatisfactory outcome

The recommendation Unsatisfactory/Show cause is a serious one that is not made lightly. The Panel makes this recommendation on the basis of unsatisfactory performance of the research and subsequent failure to meet remedial milestones set for the additional interim review.

3.5.1 The role of the Faculty Higher Degree Committee

The Faculty Higher Degree Committee or equivalent has responsibility for considering the Panel's show cause recommendation and, if supported, referring the recommendation for approval by the Dean of Graduate Research. The PGC typically refers the Panel recommendation to the Committee.

3.5.2 Support for the candidate

The candidate must be made aware following additional interim reviews that the panel recommendation will be that "the candidate be requested to show cause as to why the candidature should not be terminated". As part of the review completion, the candidate should also be informed about the procedures that will be followed and advised on the appropriate avenues for support as outlined in Section 4.

3.5.3 Show cause process

Documentation. The PGC should submit to the Committee a show cause recommendation with all documentation relating to the research progress within the candidature. As a minimum, this should include documentation of prior research progress reviews and related actions clearly outlining the:

- (i). Remedial actions required, milestones set and a clear statement of the dates by which the candidate was expected to achieve these
- (ii). Candidate's progress against the remedial milestones set in prior reviews
- (iii). Candidate's awareness of the reasons and actions as outlined above in (i) and (ii)
- (iv). Panel's reasons for recommending show cause.

Committee recommendation. After considering all documentation, if the Committee supports the recommendation, the Dean of Graduate Research will notify the candidate in writing that they are required to show cause as to why their candidature

should not be terminated. The letter will include the reasons noted by the Committee.

If the Committee does not support the recommendation, they must propose to the Dean of Graduate Research the conditions that will be placed on the candidature including, but not limited to, an additional review against new milestones or completion of the thesis by a specific date. The candidate will be informed of these conditions in writing.

Candidate's response. The candidate must respond to the Graduate Research School within 20 working days of receipt of the show cause letter. The candidate's response should include documentation and any supporting evidence for their case, which may relate to personal, technical or academic matters.

The response will be referred to the Committee. If the candidate fails to respond by the due date, the candidature will be terminated and the candidate will be advised in writing by the Graduate Research School.

Satisfactory response. If the Committee is satisfied with the material presented by the student in response to a show cause request, clear milestones that must be met over the following three month period will be agreed in collaboration with the candidate and supervisors. At the end of the three month period, the Committee will require a report from the supervisor as to whether the student should be permitted to continue or have their candidature terminated. The candidate will be advised in writing of this decision by the Graduate Research School.

Unsatisfactory response. If the Committee is not satisfied with the material presented by the student in response to the show cause request, then the candidature will be terminated. The candidate will be advised in writing of this decision by the Graduate Research School. Complaints relating to the termination of candidature outcome should be made as outlined in the Student Complaint Procedure.

3.6 Show cause as part of a lapsed candidature

A lapsed candidature occurs when a candidate fails to re-enrol and is absent without approved leave. Progress may be deemed unsatisfactory due to lapsed candidature and a candidate may be asked to show cause as a result of an inadequate response to a lapsed candidature notification. The procedure outlined in the Variation of Candidature Procedure will be followed in such cases.

3.7 Show cause due to failure to undergo a research progress review

Where a candidate fails to undergo a Progress Review scheduled in accordance with policy and procedure, the candidate may be asked to show cause.

3.8 Managing issues relating to supervision

Research candidates may feel reluctant to raise issues relating to their supervision during a formal review. It is critical that all candidates are given the opportunity to meet with the Panel alone and to raise any issues in the absence of the supervisors.

3.8.1 Supervisory team changes

If during a review a change in supervision arrangements is signalled, the HDR Supervision Policy and the Variation of Candidature Procedure should be followed.

3.8.2 Referral of issues relating to supervision

If the Panel does not feel comfortable with managing the issues raised, the candidate should be formally referred to an appropriate authority such as the Head of School, the Associate Dean Research or the Dean of Graduate Research.

3.9 Documentation of formal reviews

Completed formal review forms and outcomes will be maintained on the student system. All other documentation relating to the academic aspects of the progress review should be maintained by the PGC/Head of School. Any plans for remedial action that are not included on the review form should be added to the candidate's file by the PGC.

4. Resources and Support Services

A range of resources and support services are available for all candidates at UNSW.

- (i). The GRS has Faculty Candidature Officers, who can provide information on policies and procedures as applicable across the University. The GRS Student Liaison Manager is also available for all candidates to provide confidential advice. The Director of GRS or the Dean on Graduate Research can assist candidates and this usually occurs via a referral from the Student Liaison Manager.
- (ii). The Faculty or School in which the candidate is enrolled can provide specific details of how policy and procedures are implemented. The PGC, supervisors, Director of Postgraduate Studies/Associate Dean Research can provide specific advice and guidance.
- (iii). Student Development offers a variety of services for UNSW students, including Counselling and Psychological Services and the Learning Centre, who can provide support and skills development.
- (iv). The Student Conduct and Appeals Officer is available for advice relating to the Complaints Procedure.
- (v). For independent advice including legal advice and advocacy, candidates should contact Arc @ UNSW, the student organisation.

5. Review & History

This procedure is due for review three years from its date of effect.

Appendix A: History

Version	Authorised by	Approval Date	Effective Date	Sections modified
V2	Dean of Graduate Research	25/08/09	25/08/09	V1 is not available
1.0	Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)	23 October 2012	23 October 2012	Revision, reformat using GS templates

Appendix B: Process for following up review outcomes

The process illustrated is an example for full-time PhD candidates. For any candidate enrolled part-time, the first review will be an APR and the second review will be a CONFR. For Master level candidates, confirmation is not required unless requesting a transfer to the PhD program.

