Guide for Year 1 and Confirmation of Candidature for Higher Degree by Research Students

School of Social Sciences
College of Arts, Law and Education

Advice for Candidates, Supervisors, and Confirmation of Candidature Committee Members

Version 1.0 2023 |

UNIVERSITY *of*
TASMANIA

Acknowledgment of Country

The University of Tasmania pays its respects to elders past and present and to the many Aboriginal people that did not make elder status and to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community that continues to care for Country. We acknowledge the profound effect of climate change on this Country and seek to work alongside Tasmanian Aboriginal communities, with their deep wisdom and knowledge, to address climate change and its impacts.

The Palawa people belong to one of the world's oldest living cultures, continually resident on this Country for over 65,000 years. They have survived and adapted to significant climate changes over this time, such as sea-level rise and extreme rainfall variability, and as such embody thousands of generations of intimate place-based knowledge.

We acknowledge with deep respect that this knowledge represents a range of cultural practices, wisdom, traditions, and ways of knowing the world that provide accurate and useful climate change information, observations, and solutions.

The University of Tasmania likewise recognises a history of truth that acknowledges the impacts of invasion and colonisation upon Aboriginal people, resulting in forcible removal from their lands.

Our island is deeply unique, with cities and towns surrounded by spectacular landscapes of bushland, waterways, mountain ranges, and beaches.

The University of Tasmania stands for a future that profoundly respects and acknowledges Aboriginal perspectives, culture, language, and history, and a continued effort to fight for Aboriginal justice and rights paving the way for a strong future.

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1. Welcome

Welcome to the School of Social Sciences at the University of Tasmania. This is a brief guide to the first 12 months of your candidature. We hope that it will help you navigate the large amount of information available to you on the Graduate Research website about the expectations and milestones associated with your first year of candidature.

2. Administrative requirements

The are a number of preliminary tasks to complete as part of your induction:

• HDR Induction MyLO module

• Research Integrity at the University of Tasmania (RIEU101) MyLO module

• Safety and Wellbeing Induction MyLO module

• Human and/or Animal Research Ethics training MyLO module where applicable

For further information see the Graduate Research Candidate Guide.

3. General instructions and advice

3.1 iGrad

iGrad is the electronic Candidature Management system used at UTAS. This system gives you, your supervisors and your Graduate Research Coordinator (GRC) an overview of your entire candidature, monitors your progress via Action Dates, and allows you to submit your Research Plans, Annual Review Progress Reports, and Thesis for examination online. You will find the iGrad login, alongside supporting Higher Degree by Research (HDR) information, here: http://www.utas.edu.au/research-admin/graduate-research/igrad

Throughout your candidature you will receive regular emails from iGrad prompting you about upcoming (or overdue) milestones and meetings. Copies of these emails are also sent to your supervisor/s and the GRC.

3.2 Meeting with the supervisory team

Candidates will usually have teams of two or three supervisors. The primary supervisor will have a load of 50% with the remaining load split between remaining members of the supervision team. You may have additional members of the team who are research advisers.

Your entire supervisory team should meet formally with you at least once every two months to review your progress and plan future objectives. You are likely to meet more frequently with your Primary Supervisor, especially in this first year. You and the supervisory team will agree on a supervision meeting schedule but this may vary depending on stage of candidature and study load. Depending on the specific knowledge and skills your co-supervisors bring to your project, there may be important project and support reasons to vary this pattern, especially as your project progresses. You may also use supervision meetings to review drafts, troubleshoot problems, discuss literature, and prepare for milestones such as the Confirmation of Candidature.

Your Primary Supervisor will confirm required meetings have taken place on iGrad and add comments on your academic progress.

3.3 Graduate Certificate in Research

All research higher degree candidates are required to undertake coursework associated with the Graduate Certificate in Research X5A. Coursework units are designed to provide you with a range of training activities and career development opportunities that assist you to develop high-level research, communication and project management skills.

Information about the Graduate Certificate and links for enrolling in units can be found here:

https://universitytasmania.sharepoint.com/sites/research-division/SitePages/Graduate-Research-Coursework.aspx

PhD Candidates:

There are two compulsory units and two elective units in the certificate. Some elective units have been designed specifically for the Graduate Certificate in Research, while others are offered as part of other courses at the university. The electives you undertake will be those that best suit the needs of your project.

You must complete XGR501 Introduction to Higher Degree by Research, and one other unit prior to Confirmation of Candidature, and then complete an additional 25 credit points (or equivalent to two elective units) within the first two years of your degree. The types of assessments you complete in this unit will contribute to the work you do on your thesis.

It is highly recommended that the second unit completed before Confirmation be XGR502 Communicating Research. However, it is understood that in some cases greater benefit may be gained from completion of an elective unit at this time. Please discuss with your primary Supervisor and the Course Coordinator of the Graduate Certificate in Research if you are considering a unit other than XGR502 in the first year.

Research Masters Candidates:

You must complete XGR501 Introduction to Higher Degree by Research prior to Confirmation of Candidature and a second unit (XGR502 Communicating Research or an elective unit) before thesis submission for examination.

3.4 Research Plan

In the first three months (full-time equivalent) of your candidature, your main task is to develop your draft research plan. The completed research plan is uploaded to iGrad under the 'Research Plan' tab.

You will develop your research plan in consultation with your supervisor(s). It will include a brief background to your topic, along with your planned research questions, methodology, practical considerations, (e.g. infrastructure requirements), ethical considerations and timeline. Working on this plan helps you to think concretely about the work you will be doing during your PhD.

It is recommended that you work on your Research Plan as a Word file first. This will assist in incorporating feedback from your supervisory team, rather than working from the form in iGrad. Your supervision team can provide feedback on this document before you upload it to iGrad for formal approval. A template for the research plan is available on the following page under the section on major candidature milestones:

http://www.utas.edu.au/research-admin/graduate-research/current-candidates/your-candidature-milestones

When complete, you will submit your draft research plan to iGrad. It will be sent to the GRC for approval. They will determine if the draft research plan provides enough information on the research project aims, methods, directions, and milestones to confirm the proposed research project is suitable for the nominated level of study. If satisfied, they will sign off on the research plan in iGrad.

Your research plan is a dynamic document and will be revised throughout candidature. It is an important document for passing Confirmation of Candidature and is used by the GRC at each Annual Review of Progress.

3.4.1 Budget planning

As part of your research plan, you will need to prepare a budget for your project. You may want to include funding to present your research at a conference or for costs associated with data collection, publication expenses, transcription costs, editing, and so forth. On successful completion of your Confirmation of Candidature, you will have access to HDR funding support through the School of Social Sciences which can be used to fund these activities (currently $3000 for PhD candidates and $1500 for Masters candidates).

4. Confirmation of Candidature

All candidates are required to participate in the Confirmation of Candidature process, which must take place before seven months for a full-time Masters candidate and before 12 months for a full-time doctoral candidate (or the equivalent for part-time candidates).

The Confirmation of Candidature process allows the University to assess your academic development and performance at an early stage in your candidature, along with matters such as the appropriateness and availability of resources and the suitability of your supervisory team. The purpose of the Confirmation is to assess your academic preparedness, capacity, and capability to successfully complete the HDR within the maximum degree period.

Confirmation must be obtained for candidacy to continue.

The Confirmation assessment will review evidence of satisfactory academic progress and your ability to:

a) develop a clearly defined research plan at the level acceptable for HDR candidature and appropriate for the research discipline

b) write in English (and an approved Australian Indigenous Language, in accordance with the Research Training Ordinance, if relevant) at the HDR standard in a style and format appropriate for the discipline

c) concisely and coherently present your research in English at a public forum in a style and format appropriate for the discipline

d) constructively participate in peer review by receiving critique and defend their work

e) complete mandatory coursework to the required standard, and

f) meet any discipline specific requirements that have been documented within the first three months of candidature.

The Confirmation process has several parts and you and your supervisory team need to start preparing for it well before the Confirmation meeting is held. You should complete the candidate form available in the Confirmation/Annual Review tab of iGrad within two weeks before the Confirmation due date. Your Primary Supervisor (on behalf of the supervisory team) should complete the supervisor form in the same tab. Once both forms have been submitted,

they are made available to the GRC, who then convenes a Confirmation Committee in accordance with clause 6.9 of the [HDR Academic Progress Procedure](#).

To have your candidature confirmed, you must provide the following, which will be reviewed by the members of the Confirmation Committee prior to the Confirmation meeting:

- your Research Plan

- a piece of substantial written work (e.g. a literature review, a draft chapter, or another piece of writing related to your PhD)

- an oral presentation to an academic audience (see below)

- evidence that the minimum number of supervisory team meetings have been held (these will have been recorded on iGrad)

- evidence of required coursework completion

- any additional criteria required by your School or specified in your letter of offer.

Detailed information can be found in the [Research Training Ordinance](#) and the [HDR Academic Progress Procedure](#).

4.1   Ethics requirements

As you develop your ideas and plans for your research, you should be thinking about and discussing with your supervisors the ethical issues that need to be considered for your study (e.g., participant consent, risk management, sensitive topics etc.). Most Social Science research projects will involve human participants, so human research ethics requirements need to be addressed.

4.2   Oral presentation

You will need to give a public oral presentation on your proposed research to an academic audience prior to Confirmation of Candidature. This presentation should demonstrate your competence, communication skills and the ability to respond to questions about the research project.

In the School of Social Sciences, this presentation can be delivered as part of the Brown Bag seminar sessions which are held each Friday lunchtime. Alternatively, if you have the opportunity to attend and speak about your research at an academic conference in your first 11 months, you may use this presentation to meet this requirement.

The oral presentation provides you the opportunity to discuss aspects of your proposed research project, including its scope, feasibility, and originality. It is also an opportunity to receive feedback from staff and students on your proposed theoretical approach, method and/or research design. The presentation should be followed by time for questions and answers. All members of the supervisory team are expected to attend this presentation.

There should be enough time left between your oral presentation and the Confirmation meeting for you to revise and adapt your research plan and other written work to incorporate the feedback you have received.

4.3   The Confirmation Committee

The Confirmation Committee usually consists of the GRC, your Primary Supervisor, any Co-Supervisors, and an external reviewer. The GRC chooses the external reviewer in consultation with you and the supervisor team. The external reviewer will be external to the supervisory team and an experienced supervisor from a College within the University. The Confirmation of

Candidature committee may also include a subject-matter expert, either internal or external to the University.

Before the Confirmation meeting takes place:

- you (the **candidate)** should provide copies of your research proposal and written work to the Confirmation Committee (at least three weeks prior)

- the **external reviewer** should provide feedback on the research proposal and the sample of written work to the GRC and supervision team (typically verbal feedback at the meeting of the Confirmation Committee)

- the **supervisory team** should provide feedback on the research proposal and the sample of written work to the GRC and external reviewer (typically verbal feedback at the meeting of the Confirmation Committee, as the supervision team will have already provided multiple rounds of feedback on your written work before it is sent to the GRC and the external reviewer)

4.4   Confirmation of Candidature meeting

The Confirmation of Candidature meeting is where Confirmation formally takes place. The meeting should be attended at a minimum by you, the GRC, all members of the supervisory team and the external reviewer. If a member of the supervisory team cannot be present, the GRC must be satisfied that all members of the supervisory team have had an opportunity to provide comments on the candidate's academic performance and progress.

During the Confirmation Committee meeting, you and the Committee members will discuss the documents you provided and the feedback from the external reviewer and your supervisors. The Committee members may ask further questions about your proposal, to help them determine:

- whether or not the proposed study will make a unique and important contribution to theory and knowledgeif the project is soundly based, well-designed, and achievable in the timeframe and circumstances, and

- that you can communicate and defend their research.

Discussion at a Confirmation of Candidature Committee meeting should be collegial, constructive, cordial, professional, and transparent, and along with the formal aspects of the process, provide you with helpful suggestions and ideas which will enhance your study. As with any performance review, any major problems with your work should have been identified ahead of time.

4.5   Confirmation of Candidature outcomes

At the final stage of the Confirmation of Candidature process, the Confirmation Committee will make a final recommendation from the list provided in point 6.17 of the HDR Academic Progress Procedure. This recommendation is the Committee's decision on whether your candidature will be Confirmed.

There are five possible outcomes from a Confirmation of Candidature:

- candidature is confirmed;

- candidature is not confirmed at this stage and the pre-Confirmation period is extended for up to three months (six months if part-time) with a due date for a second Confirmation of Candidature attempt;

- candidature is not confirmed and is recommended to be terminated;

- candidature status is changed:

- candidature is transferred from a Doctoral to a Master of Research degree (for Doctoral candidates only);

- candidature is approved for transfer to a PhD (for Masters of Research candidates seeking this only)

The GRC will enter the outcome into the Confirmation of Candidature form in iGrad.

In cases where the Committee decides that Confirmation should be delayed and the pre-Confirmation period extended, they may ask you to do further work. This could include:

- submitting revised documents (e.g. a revised research plan or further written work), with the revisions addressing the concerns raised

- writing a response to a specific set of identified issues

- delivering another oral presentation.

If this outcome arises, the GRC will make sure you are provided with appropriate support, and a Candidature Management Plan may be developed to assist you to understand and meet the requirements. Confirmation of Candidature can only be repeated once. If, after this second attempt to meet the requirements, you are unable to demonstrate satisfactory performance and progress, your candidature may be terminated or transferred as above.

An outcome of termination of candidature is **rare**.

Progress of your candidature will be formally reviewed every 12 months as part of the annual review procedure.

5. Well-being and taking care of yourself

There are a number of unique stressors faced by HDR candidates. Research takes a great deal of time and it can often be stressful and isolating. To thrive during your candidature, it is important that you stay as mentally and physically well as possible. This can help you to better overcome challenges, build healthy relationships and work more productively.

There are a number of resources available that can help you to look after your physical and mental health and achieve a good work-life balance.

- Safety, Health and Wellbeing
- Work, Health & Wellbeing Network
- Counselling and Wellbeing
- Support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander HDR candidates

Most importantly, you should never be shy about reaching out to someone if you need to talk. This person might be one of your supervisors, your GRC, another HDR candidate, a family member or friend, or anyone you are comfortable talking to.

6. Further questions

If you have any questions, please contact your supervisor or GRC. Please note that the Graduate Research Office is also there to assist you.