



Charles Sturt  
University

# Higher Degree by Research Probationary Period and Confirmation of Candidature Procedure

## Faculty of Science and Health

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# 1. Overview of Probationary Period

Admission to candidature for all Higher Degree by Research (HDR) programs (except for the Doctor of Philosophy by Prior Publication) shall commence on a probationary basis unless exemption is approved by the University Research Committee or nominee. Probationary candidature periods are expected to be completed in the timeframes detailed in the table below:

Course	Part-Time Candidates	Full-Time Candidates
Doctor of Philosophy	12-24 months	6-12 months
Master of Philosophy	12-18 months	6-9 months
Doctor of Veterinary Studies	N/A	6-12 months
Master of Veterinary Studies	N/A	6-9 months

The Sub-Dean Graduate Studies shall, in consultation with the Principal Supervisor, shall specify the conditions of the probationary period at the time of admission. These conditions will include, but are not limited to:

- Attendance and participation at an online [HDR Candidate Induction](#);
- Completion of an [Expectations Alignment and Communications Plan](#) by the end of the first eight weeks of candidature of the research component of any HDR program;
- Completion of Academic and Research Integrity training;
- Completion of a literature review/synopsis of literature to a standard approved by the supervisory team;
- Presentation of a research proposal seminar;
- Submission of a written research proposal (Appendix 1) to a standard approved by the supervisory team and Sub-Dean Graduate Studies;
- Submission of a Data Management Plan;
- Attendance at the Faculty HDR and Honours Symposium. Candidates in their first session full-time or first year part-time are not required to present.

This procedure should be read in conjunction with the CSU [Higher Degree by Research Policy and Procedure](#).

## 1.1. Induction Attendance

New candidates should aim to attend and participate in the online [Graduate Research Candidate Welcome & Induction](#) in their first three months. This forms part of the probationary requirements. The workshop will help candidates to get started on their HDR journey, connect them with support staff and other HDR candidates, and give a broad perspective of the HDR lifecycle.

## 1.2. Expectations Alignment and Communications Plan

New candidates and their supervisors are required to complete an [Expectations Alignment and Communications Plan \(EACP\)](#) by the end of the first eight weeks of candidature of the research component of any HDR program.

The purpose of this plan is to:

- clarify understandings, expectations, and responsibilities between yourself (the candidate) and your supervisory team regarding your research project;
- align expectations to prevent misunderstandings and disagreements during the candidature; and
- discuss the type of guidance that can be expected from your supervisory team.

The EACP is a probationary milestone that must be submitted to [graduatereserach@csu.edu.au](mailto:graduatereserach@csu.edu.au) upon completion.

### 1.3. Academic and Research Integrity Training

Play your part in maintaining academic integrity at our university. Complete your compulsory [Academic Integrity at Charles Sturt University](#) subject. This subject will help you understand our Academic Integrity Policy, our expectations of you, and the support services available to help you meet your academic obligations.

You'll learn how to avoid plagiarism, cheating, contract cheating, and collusion. Charles Sturt University treats breaches of academic integrity seriously. Turnitin is used to check your submitted work for plagiarism or contract cheating.

The [Academic Integrity Procedure](#) covers the requirements for compulsory training of HDR candidates in academic integrity and research integrity.

You can use [Turnitin to check for plagiarism](#) in your assessments before submission.

### 1.4. Literature Review

As part of the probationary requirements, and during the first year of enrolment, candidates will be required to prepare a draft literature review as part of a thesis and/or for publication. The literature review should demonstrate the candidate's knowledge of what research has previously been conducted, identify a research gap in the current literature, and articulate the practical value of addressing that gap. The length of a literature review in a HDR thesis in the Faculty of Science and Health is typically 6,000 – 24,000 words. The literature review should be at a standard approved by the supervisory team. Supervisors are to record this as having been completed in the 6 monthly progress reports.

Further information on literature reviews can be found on My HDR (via the student portal) and in the [Library Resources Guides](#).

### 1.5. Research Proposal and Confirmation Seminar

The purpose of the research proposal is to assist candidates to define the nature, scope, theoretical framework, methodological approaches, and limitations of their intended research. In addition, it allows the candidate to demonstrate their discipline as an emerging researcher in the field. The research proposal is a plan for the research; it requests fundamental information and should provide a justification for the proposed study.

A panel of experienced academics (see panel composition below) will evaluate the confirmation seminar and research proposal. Specifically, the panel will:

- evaluate the quality of the research proposal; offering useful insights and timely feedback on the feasibility of the proposed research.
- confirm that:

- the topic, scope, theory, research questions, and objectives of the research project are clearly articulated;
- the study methodologies are appropriate to the research questions being investigated; and
- the standard of writing is acceptable.
- consider whether:
  - the research direction is appropriate; and
  - the project is designed within the scope of the resources available to support its accomplishment.
- assess the candidate's likelihood of fulfilling the degree requirements within the normal candidature period;
- in the case of a course transfer request (eg. MPhil to PhD), assess if the proposed research is at the level required for the new course; and
- identify and resolve any impediments associated with the proposed research project.

## 1.6. Research Proposal and Seminar Review Panel

The Review Panel will consist of the School HDR Coordinator (Chair) and at least two reviewers:

- at least one reviewer should be a discipline and/or methodological expert;
- it is preferred that the second and/or third reviewer is external to the school;
- all reviewers should hold at least the equivalent award or relevant research/professional experience of which the candidate is submitting for;
- if a reviewer is external to the University a CV, including publications, should be sent to the School HDR Coordinator for consideration.
- external reviewers may attend the seminar presentation online or via teleconference, if they are not able to be present on campus;
- the Principal and Co-Supervisors cannot be reviewers, and any conflicts of interest must be declared to the School HDR Coordinator prior to the confirmation procedure taking place (eg. reviewers are related or in a legal relationship with each other, the candidate or the supervisor);
- the School HDR coordinator may discuss the appropriateness of the panel composition with the Head of School (or nominee) or the Sub-Dean Graduate Studies.

## 1.7. Responsibilities for Confirmation

The candidate's HDR supervisors are expected to:

- advise the candidate on probationary requirements;
- provide the candidate with feedback and guidance, addressing any issues or challenges in preparing their research proposal;
- identify any issues that compromise progression of the candidate;
- advise the candidate as to their readiness to undertake the confirmation process;
- nominate two to three potential reviewers, via the Principal Supervisor, to the School HDR Coordinator in determining the composition of the review panel;
- send the candidate's research proposal to the School HDR Coordinator at least two weeks prior to the seminar presentation;
- in the case of a course transfer, notify the School HDR Coordinator and Sub-Dean Graduate Studies of the intention;
- provide feedback to the candidate on the seminar presentation;
- support the candidate with any revisions to their research proposal documentation; and
- after the response has been completed, and if applicable, include a recommendation approving (or not approving with reasons) the response to the reviewers, together with a statement that the approved changes have been made to the final research proposal.

Candidates are expected to:

- advise their supervisor(s) of their intention to present at a seminar at least six weeks in advance of their preferred date;
- in the case of a course transfer, notify their Principal Supervisor and Sub-Dean Graduate Studies of the intention;
- prepare a research proposal and oral presentation in accordance with the Faculty of Science and Health Research Proposal Guidelines for Confirmation of Candidature (Appendix 1);
- submit their final research proposal and Turnitin report to the supervisor(s) at least three weeks in advance of the seminar date; and
- provide any revisions within the requested time period.

## 2. Confirmation Procedure

- 1.1. Prior to the end of the probationary period (normally 6 – 12 months F/T, 1 – 2 years P/T) the candidate will present their research proposal to the host school at a formal confirmation of candidature seminar. The seminar will be typically 20-30 minutes in length followed by 10-15 minutes of discussion time.
- 1.2. The research proposal, which should be 2500 – 5000 words in length (Appendix 1), and Turnitin report will be submitted to the Principal Supervisor at least three weeks prior to the seminar for review by the supervisory team.
- 1.3. The Principal Supervisor and candidate will liaise with the School HDR Coordinator (or nominee) to organise an appropriate time for the seminar. Candidates located off-campus or off-shore can present using an online platform.
- 1.4. The School HDR Coordinator or nominee, based on suggestions from the Principal Supervisor, will organise 2-3 reviewers to be on the review panel. The reviewers will be asked to review the research proposal before the candidate presents, lead the discussion at the presentation and complete the evaluation form (Appendix 2). The evaluation template will be supplied to the reviewers by the School HDR Coordinator.
- 1.5. The School HDR Coordinator will organise the review process and chair the review panel. The format of the seminar and review process may vary between Schools. The HDR Coordinator will invite an appropriate audience of staff and students, and participation from outside the school research community is also highly encouraged.
- 1.6. The reviewers' comments will be provided to the candidate and the Principal Supervisor by the School HDR Coordinator within one week following the presentation.
- 1.7. The seminar and subsequent discussion are used to provide feedback to the candidate, both informally and formally after the seminar. The process should be conducted in a collegial, supportive and consultative manner. At the subsequent discussion, the HDR Coordinator should check to ensure the candidate and supervisory team are considering any necessary ethics, biosafety or radiation safety approvals, IP assignment deed by the candidate, relevant permits, that appropriate risk assessments, and a Research Data Management Plan have been completed. Further information on conducting risk assessments can be found on the [Human Resources website](#), from the Principal Supervisor or [The Faculty of Science and Health Technical Service](#).

- 1.8. Based on the evaluations from the review panel, the School HDR Coordinator or nominee will recommend one of the following outcomes to the Sub-Dean (Graduate Studies) for decision:
- A. **Passed** with no changes.
  - B. **Passed, subject to changes**: the report will indicate the required changes, which must be made to the satisfaction of the relevant Sub-Dean (Graduate Studies).
  - C. **Resubmitted**: the candidate must complete the extra work and revisions identified as necessary by the panel, and resubmit the proposal for review by at least two reviewers. The candidate will normally have to present the revised proposal at a seminar. Only one resubmission will be permitted.
  - D. **Failed**: where the candidate fails, they will be asked to show cause why their candidature should be allowed to continue (see '[Termination of Candidature](#)' in the HDR policy).
- 1.9. If the outcome of the review is b or c, then a response to the reviewers will need to be prepared by the candidate in accordance with the Guidelines for Responding to Reviewers' Comments in Appendix 3. The School HDR Coordinator or nominee will advise the due date of any revisions that may be required to the research proposal.
- 1.10. Once the School HDR Coordinator and the Principal Supervisor are satisfied that the Research Proposal is finalised, it must be submitted together with the [Research Proposal Approval Form](#) by the candidate to the Principal Supervisor for confirmation. The Principal Supervisor forwards the documentation to the School HDR Coordinator.
- 1.11. The School HDR Coordinator collates and forwards all documentation to the Head of School (or nominee) for confirmation. This includes:
- the Reviewers' reports and, where appropriate, the candidate's response to the reviewers;
  - the [Research Proposal Approval Form](#) (signed by the Principal Supervisor and Head of School or nominee);
  - the Principal Supervisor's statement that all revisions have been included in the final Research Proposal;
  - the tracked changes copy and the final copy of the Research Proposal document;
  - the [Research Data Management plan](#) and;
  - any risk assessment documentation related to carrying out the research.
- 1.12 The Head of School (or nominee) endorses the Research Proposal Approval form and returns all documentation to the School HDR Coordinator for forwarding Sub-Dean Graduate Studies. The School HDR Coordinator must notify the Sub-Dean Graduate Studies in writing of the outcome of the confirmation (Appendix 4 – Memo Template).
- 1.13 The Sub-Dean Graduate Studies will review all documentation and either approve the form or contact the Principal Supervisor to request appropriate changes.
- 1.14 Once the Sub-Dean Graduate Studies is satisfied that all requirements have been met, the approved documentation is sent to the Office of Research Services and Graduate Studies who will confirm the approval of the thesis title and Research Proposal with the candidate.
- 1.15 Variations to this confirmation procedure may be permitted for online candidates. The Sub-Dean Graduate studies must be consulted for each occurrence.

## 3. Research Data Management Plan

Good practice in [Research Data Management](#) (RDM) is a crucial part of maximising research investment and leveraging your research efforts. RDM includes (but is not limited to):

- data retention
- accessibility
- storage
- security

All researchers and HDR students will be expected to undertake RDM training and assessment.

The [CSU Research Data Management Policy](#) requires all active research projects to have a RDM. The RDM plan will need to accompany the Research Proposal when it is submitted.

## 4. Requesting an Extension to Probationary Period

If a candidate is unable to complete their probation requirements within the specified timeframe due to exceptional circumstances, the candidate must write to the Sub-Dean Graduate Studies and their School HDR Coordinator to request an extension. The candidate must provide a supporting statement from their Principal Supervisor, outlining their reasons for being unable to complete their probation on time, and specifying a date that they expect to finalise their probation requirements. Extension requests should be submitted at least two weeks prior to the end of the specified probationary period.

## 5. Ethical and Compliance Considerations

If you are conducting research involving humans or animals in Australia and/or overseas you will need to apply for ethics approval – this application normally occurs following the formal approval of your Research Proposal. The activities within your research that require ethics review may include, but are not limited to:

- Questionnaires, surveys and scales
- Interviews
- Evaluation of classroom learning for research purposes
- Photographic and video records of individuals
- Observations
- Clinical, laboratory or classroom measurements
- Counselling and group therapy trials

The exception to this is:



- Research using only publicly available information

You will also need to apply for approval if your research;

- deals with certain goods, services and technologies related to defence (Defence trade control),
- involves the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) or potentially infectious and/or hazardous agents (human blood or tissue), the importation of biological material (Biosafety),
- uses radiation (Radiation Safety)
- uses chemicals (Chemical Safety)

See Ethics and Compliance

# Appendix 1. Research Proposal Guidelines for Confirmation of Candidature

As part of the probationary conditions for your Higher Degree by Research, candidates are required to complete and submit a research proposal.

In a general sense, a proposal is an important plan for your research. The research proposal requests fundamental information relating to the title, various approvals gained for ethics, radiation safety, and questions about intellectual property and commercial in confidence. For the specific description of the proposed research each Faculty has its own requirements relating to the type and amount of information which needs to be presented. The proposal will provide a justification for the proposed research. The justification should demonstrate that you are familiar with the key literature in the area and can critically evaluate it and use it to build an argument to justify the research question. In addition, the proposal should demonstrate that you have the methodological knowledge and skills, and that appropriate facilities, equipment and resources are available to carry out the research.

A research proposal should be approximately 2,500 – 5,000 words in length and may contain the following headings (you may add additional headings to allow for the provision of background information or any other relevant details if you wish).

**TITLE PAGE** - Include title of research proposal, candidate name and number, School/Research Centre affiliation, supervisors' names, date of submission.

**ABSTRACT (Mandatory)** – A brief summary (200-250 words) of the research to be undertaken written in non-technical language such that a non-specialist in the discipline will know what the proposal involves. Include the research question, key design and methodologies and the significance of the research.

**SYNOPSIS OF LITERATURE** – A review of the key ideas and references from the literature that underpin this study and leads to the statement of the research question(s). Think of the literature review as a funnel, starting off with a broad discussion of the existing relevant literature and then moving into a specific justification for pursuing the main research question.

**OVERALL RESEARCH QUESTION** – Your overall research question should summarise the significant issue (area of uncertainty) that your research project will investigate.

**SPECIFIC RESEARCH QUESTIONS** – State your sub-questions and briefly and clearly the associated hypotheses and/or objectives (if applicable). Your research proposal may have a number of hypotheses followed by objectives under each hypothesis.

**METHODOLOGY** – A description of how the research will be undertaken and how the data will be collected and analysed. Clearly describe the experimental design, provide a rationale for the methods that have been chosen and the procedure/technique that you will follow to conduct the research. References are expected for previously established methods. You may combine the

hypothesis, objectives, methodology and data analysis into one section (eg. Hypothesis 1 or Objective 1, followed by the methodology and data analysis that you will use to test this hypothesis or achieve this objective).

Describe the type of data your research will produce, justify why the sample sizes you have determined will be appropriate and how you plan to analyse it. If statistical analysis is part of the project, indicate whether the experimental designs have been discussed with a statistician. It is insufficient to state that data analysis will be determined in consultation with a statistician.

In this section you can also mention if there is a relationship (formal or informal) to external bodies and the role that they will play? Are you reliant on an external body for access to samples, equipment, sites or other resources?

**BUDGET** - A detailed budget is not necessary, but a statement is needed that indicates whether or not the funding required to conduct this research (all of it) has been secured.

**TIMETABLE/GANTT CHART** - Provide an outline of the major activities and a timetable for their completion. This should be in the form of a GANTT chart (best presented landscape). You will need to show how this project can realistically be completed within the timeframe for the specified degree. For the PhD this should be three years, as extensions may be granted only under exceptional circumstances.

**APPENDICES** - Documents that are relevant to the text of the Research Proposal but would otherwise clutter rather than enhance the document.

**REFERENCES** – Provide a list of references cited in the research proposal. A referencing system suited to the discipline should be used.

# Appendix 2. Reviewers Report for Evaluation of Research Proposal

<b>Reviewer Name:</b>	
<b>Candidate Name:</b>	
<b>Course: (e.g. PhD, MPhil)</b>	
<b>Title of Thesis:</b>	
<b>Date of Seminar:</b>	
<b>Recommendation:</b> (Please check recommendation with X)	
<b>A</b>	<b>Passed</b> with no changes.
<b>B</b>	<b>Passed, subject to changes:</b> the report will indicate the required changes, which must be made to the satisfaction of the Sub-Dean (Graduate Studies)
<b>C</b>	<b>Resubmitted:</b> the candidate must complete the extra work and revisions identified as necessary by the panel, and resubmit the proposal for review by at least two reviewers. The candidate will normally have to present the revised proposal at a seminar. Only one resubmission will be permitted.
<b>D</b>	<b>Failed:</b> where the candidate fails, they will be asked to show cause why their candidature should be allowed to continue.
<b>Comments on Proposal</b> (Please clearly differentiate changes that must be made from more general observations that the student should consider)	
<b>1. The candidate is working on a significant/important research issue.</b>	
<b>Comments:</b>	
<b>Recommendations:</b>	
<b>2. The candidate demonstrates a critical and detailed knowledge, and understanding of the relevant literature, and theoretical framework, where appropriate.</b>	
<b>Comments:</b>	
<b>Recommendations:</b>	
<b>3. The candidate develops a clear and focused research question, and hypothesis where relevant.</b>	
<b>Comments:</b>	
<b>Recommendations:</b>	

<b>4. The methods and techniques adopted are appropriate to the topic and the candidate justifies the choice convincingly.</b>	
Comments:	
Recommendations:	
<b>5. The candidate demonstrates that the research will make an original and significant contribution to knowledge or understanding and/or professional practice commensurate with the expectations of the degree to be undertaken.</b>	
Comments:	
Recommendations:	
<b>6. The proposal demonstrates a sufficiently high standard of literary quality</b>	
Comments:	
Recommendations:	
<b>7. Detail any ethical risks or compliance aspects inherent to the project that have not been considered by the candidate</b>	
Comments:	
Recommendations:	
<b>8. The candidate outlines a clear and realistic timeline for the project</b>	
Comments:	
Recommendations:	
<b>9. Are there any other issues with the proposal or proposed research that you consider need to be addressed at this stage?</b>	
Comments:	
<b>10. Are you confident that the candidate has the capacity to complete in the minimum period?</b>	
Comments:	
<b>11. Any general concluding remarks (please comment here if a course transfer is being requested)</b>	

Signature:

Date:

# Appendix 3. Guidelines for Responding to Reviewers Comments

1. Make any corrections or revisions in your research proposal using 'Track Changes'. Make sure that you keep a copy of the original research proposal that you submitted for the confirmation seminar.
2. Your response to the reviewer's comments should be presented in a systematic manner using a tabular format in which you clearly indicate the comment to which you are responding, and then give your response. See example below.
3. If you accept a reviewer's criticism, you need to indicate your acceptance and provide the verbatim change(s) that you will make, clearly indicating where they will go – indicate page numbers. If the change is relatively small, then include the text in the body of your response. If it is longer, that is, more than two paragraphs, attach it to the tabulated response as an Appendix.
4. In discussions with your supervisor, if you think that a reviewer's criticism or request for further work is not valid and you decide not to make any change, you must provide an explanation of why you do not accept the reviewer's viewpoint. Such explanations should be in the form of a logical and academic argument. Beware of:
  - a. attacking a reviewer. Reviewers were chosen based on their expertise and so simply suggesting that they are incompetent does not carry any weight;
  - b. basing an argument solely on the fact that one reviewer mentioned the issue and the other did not. Quite frequently, based on expertise only one reviewer identifies a problem and the fact that the other did not, does not invalidate the criticism;
  - c. dismissing a criticism on the basis that the relevant information was given elsewhere. Such criticisms can indicate that you have not presented the ideas and information clearly and hence that you need to revise it to clarify the material; and
  - d. arguing in multidisciplinary studies that the reviewer is an expert in the discipline and hence implying that they are requiring too much expert knowledge. In multidisciplinary research, the researcher has to be proficient in all the disciplines covered in the research proposal.
5. Each grammatical, spelling and typographical error does not need to be individually addressed in your response. Instead, a generic statement indicating that this has been attended to will suffice. Your supervisor will check to ensure that such changes have been made in the revised research proposal.

<b>Prof. XXX's comments</b>	<b>Corrections/Responses, including page numbers</b>
1. The title being misleading	It was changed to "...".
2. Including the prediction of the Rescorla-Wagner (R-W) model for the data presented.	I agree with Prof. XXX's comment that the R-W model is an important theory in the debate about human causality judgments. However, I did not include the R-W model specifically in the current studies because it is well documented that the R-W model cannot account for many of the conditioning arrangements employed in this research (backward blocking, latent inhibition and release from overshadowing). The model presented by Dickinson and Burke (1997) is a development of the R-W specifically to account for such phenomena. Therefore, it makes more sense to include this model not the R-W model where the findings are already well reported.
3. The second line of work with sequential elements and compounds has not considered the highly relevant work of Helena Matute and her colleagues at the University of Deusto in Spain. Hiramatsu should consult this work and discuss its significance to these dissertation projects. Below are some citations and initial comments about the relevance of the work.	I agree with Prof. XXX that the work by Matute and her colleagues is relevant to the second part of my research proposal. However, the way I interpret their data is different from Matute's. If the context is regarded as the second CS, the results are still due to the within-compound association and, therefore, Dickinson and Burke's model can account for their data. However, I acknowledge that this argument needs to be made. Hence, I insert the following in pg. 101. "On the other hand, Matute and Pineno argued that a within-compound association is not always necessary for cue competition.
3. At several points in the research proposal the candidate refers to the "Hays test" for post-hoc tests. I am not familiar with this test, could the candidate be a bit more specific about what it does?	On pg.65, the following footnote was inserted. "The Hays procedure enables the Decision Wise error rate to be used as a valid estimate of the Experimental Wise error rate for each test by employing a set of contrasts which are fully orthogonal (Hays, 1972)."
10. The participant's information for Experiment 3.1 and 3.2 are identical (total number of participants, gender breakdown, mean age and age range). Were the same subjects used for both experiments? If so, what implications does this have for the analyses and interpretation of the data?	This was addressed in the response to A/Prof YYY's comments (2).

# Appendix 4. School HDR Coordinator Memorandum to Sub-Dean Graduate Studies

Memo to: [insert Sub-Dean name]

From:

Date:

Subject: Confirmation of Candidature: [insert degree and student name]

Dear [insert Sub-Dean name],

[Please insert the following information;

- Date of seminar
- Composition of review panel and supervisors in attendance
- How many people attended the seminar
- A summary of the seminar outcome and audience participation
- A summary of the review panel comments, any issues raised, did the proposal require revising, any progress issues that may be foreseen, is the candidate requesting a course transfer.]

Therefore, based on recommendations contained within this letter, I recommend/ do not recommend the Confirmation of [insert student name] Candidature.

Sincerely,

[insert School HDR Coordinator name/signature]