

FACULTY OF ARTS AND EDUCATION

Procedure for the confirmation of candidature seminar and research proposal

Background

Higher Degree by Research (HDR) candidates are provisionally enrolled and will have their candidature confirmed at the successful completion of their probation requirements. A major part of these requirements is the confirmation seminar and submission of a written research proposal. This usually occurs:

- for full-time PhD candidates, within 12 months of enrolment;
- for part-time PhD candidates, within 2 years of enrolment;
- for Professional Doctoral candidates as part of the research proposal subject;
- for full-time Masters candidates, within 6 - 9 months of enrolment; and
- for part-time Masters candidates, within 12 - 18 months of enrolment.

To finalise their probationary period and have their candidature confirmed, HDR candidates will be required to successfully complete the following tasks as identified by the supervisory team at the time of admission, and in line with each school's conventions:

1. participate in an online HDR induction workshop;
2. complete a literature review, as part of the research proposal, in which the candidate critically evaluates the literature and uses the literature to connect with their research question(s) and proposed methodology;
3. submit a research proposal not exceeding 20,000 words, which will be reviewed by two experienced academics;
4. present a seminar based on their proposed research;
5. complete additional requirements as specified during admission; and
6. following consideration of the reviewers' feedback revise the proposal according to the *Guidelines for Responding to Reviewers' Comments* (see Appendix 2).

This procedure should be read in conjunction with the Charles Sturt University [Higher Degree by Research Policy - Enrolment and Progress](#).

Objectives: 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 the research. In addition, it allows the candidate to demonstrate their understanding of their discipline as an emerging researcher in the field. The research proposal is a plan for the research; it conveys fundamental information, and should provide a justification for the proposed study.

Two experienced academics will evaluate the research proposal in light of explanations provided by the candidate in the confirmation seminar. Specifically, they 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; and
- identify any impediments associated with the proposed research project.

Proposal Reviewers

A minimum of two reviewers shall be appointed for the purpose of reviewing the candidate's research proposal:

- both reviewers must be Tier 2 Research Active, or equivalent in the case of academics employed at other institutions, except in cases where two Tier 2 academics are not readily available, in which case the Sub-Dean Graduate Studies may approve a reviewer who is Tier 1 research active;
- one reviewer should be an appropriate discipline and/or methodological expert;
- it is preferred that one reviewer be external to the school;
- if a reviewer is external to the University a CV, including publications, should be sent to the Head of School for consideration; Reviewers may come into the seminar presentation via online participation if they are not able to be present on campus; and
- members of the supervisory team cannot be reviewers.

Approval of Reviewers: The Principal Supervisor will discuss with the school HDR Coordinator the plan for the upcoming Confirmation of Candidature seminar. The HDR Coordinator will consult with Head of School to ensure the proposed reviewers meet the research active requirements above.

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;
- advise the School's HDR Coordinator, and the Head of School in determining the composition of the review team;
- distribute the candidate's research proposal to the agreed reviewers two weeks prior to the seminar presentation;
- provide feedback to the candidate on the seminar presentation;
- support the candidate with any revisions to their confirmation documentation; and
- after the response to the reviewers has been completed, include a recommendation approving (or not approving with reasons) the response 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;
- prepare a research proposal and oral presentation in accordance with the *Faculty of Arts & Education Research Proposal Guidelines for Confirmation of Candidature*;
- submit their final research proposal to the supervisor(s) at least three weeks in advance of the seminar date; and
- provide any revisions within the requested time period.

Confirmation procedure

1. Normally, before the end of the first year of full-time equivalent enrolment, (or for Professional Doctorate or research Masters programs refer 'Background' above), each candidate will present their research proposal at a confirmation of candidature seminar. The presentation will typically be 20 - 30 minutes in length followed by relevant discussion, including reviewers' comments. The final research proposal, which must not exceed 20,000 words (see guidelines later in this document), will be submitted to the principal supervisor for review at least three weeks prior to the seminar. Note: the research proposal should be run through Turnitin prior to submission to the supervisor, and a copy of the report included with the submission.
2. The principal supervisor and candidate will liaise with the school HDR coordinator or nominee, and organise an appropriate time for the seminar - Where possible candidates located off-campus

are encouraged to attend the seminar in person on campus. Alternatively they may present via online methods.

3. Two reviewers will be appointed to review the proposal before the candidate presents at the seminar. Each reviewer will complete a reviewer's report (Appendix 1). The *Guidelines for Reviewers*, together with the report template, will be supplied by the school HDR Coordinator.
4. The school HDR Coordinator will oversee the review process and chair the seminar. The format of the seminar may vary from school to school. The HDR Coordinator will invite an appropriate audience of staff and students, who are encouraged to engage with the review process. Participation from outside the school research community is also highly encouraged.
5. Following the seminar presentation, reviewers will send their reports to the HDR Coordinator, who forwards them to the candidate and the principal supervisor within one week following the presentation.
6. If either of the reviewers rate the proposal as 'b' below (clause 8), then the candidate prepares a response to the reviewer(s) according to the *Guidelines for Responding to Reviewers' Comments* (Appendix 2). The timeframe for this response will be determined by the HDR Coordinator.
7. If the research proposal is not endorsed, and the candidate is required to undertake further work along the lines indicated by the reviewer(s), the candidate is required to resubmit their proposal and present the revised proposal at another seminar. Please note only one resubmission is permitted.
8. Based on the reviewers' evaluations and the candidate's responses the HDR Coordinator recommends to the Sub-Dean Graduate Studies that:
 - a. the research proposal be endorsed without any amendments;
 - b. the research proposal be endorsed subject to amendments to be included in the final proposal;
 - c. the research proposal is not endorsed and the candidate be required to undertake further work to develop a revised proposal. In this case the proposal must be presented at another seminar presentation; or
 - d. in the case of a resubmitted research proposal, if the proposal is not endorsed the candidate be required to show cause as to why their candidature should be continued.

Research Proposal Approval Process

Once the Principal Supervisor is satisfied that the Research Proposal is finalised, the candidate raises the [Research Proposal Approval Form](#) and sends it to the Principal Supervisor for their endorsement. The Principal Supervisor forwards all documentation to the school HDR Coordinator.

The school HDR Coordinator checks, collates and forwards all documentation to the Head of School for confirmation. This includes:

- the Reviewers' reports and, where appropriate, the candidate's response to the reviewer(s);
- the Research Proposal Approval Form (endorsed by the Principal Supervisor);
- the Principal Supervisor's statement that all revisions have been included in the final Research Proposal; and
- the final Research Proposal document.

The Head of School endorses the Research Proposal Approval form and returns it to the HDR Coordinator.

Based on clause 8 above, the Coordinator sends a recommendation to the Sub-Dean Graduate Studies, along with all documentation.

The Sub-Dean Graduate Studies reviews the documentation and either approves the form, or contacts the Principal Supervisor to request appropriate changes.

Once the Sub-Dean Graduate Studies is satisfied that all requirements have been met, the approved documentation is sent to the research office who confirms the completion of the research proposal component of probation, and the thesis title, with the candidate.

Variations to this confirmation procedure may be permitted for online candidates. The Sub-Dean Graduate Studies must be consulted for each occurrence.

FACULTY OF ARTS & EDUCATION RESEARCH PROPOSAL GUIDELINES

A research proposal is an important plan for your research. It helps the researcher to focus their thoughts and to ensure that the research is justified and is properly designed. 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 the candidate:

- is familiar with the key literature in their chosen field of study;
- can critically evaluate the literature and use it to connect with their research question(s) and proposed methodology; and
- has demonstrated that they have the necessary methodological knowledge and skills needed to carry out the research successfully.

Research proposals typically require several drafts before they reach an acceptable standard. This needs to be taken into consideration when preparing the proposal, especially to allow time for the supervisor to review drafts, and for the candidate to undertake any required revisions.

Supervisors and candidates are encouraged to attend research office professional development workshops designed to help with the successful completion of their research proposal and literature review.

SUGGESTED FORMAT FOR WRITTEN RESEARCH PROPOSAL

- For the type of research conducted in the Faculty of Arts and Education, ***the proposal must not exceed 20,000 words*** – the faculty expects that the Research Proposal will usually be at least 12,000 – 20,000 words for PhDs, and 12,000 words for Professional Doctorates and Research Masters. The minimum word count is 12,000 words.
- The document should be double-spaced (12 point font size) to allow notation by members of the reviewers, and numbered on each page.

A research proposal should contain, but is not limited to, the following headings:

TITLE PAGE

Include title of research proposal, candidate name and number, School/Research Centre affiliation, supervisor's names, date of submission.

ABSTRACT

A brief summary (200-250 words) of the research to be undertaken. Include the research question, key design and methodologies, and the significance of the research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Should include a list of all sections, titles, subtitles and page numbers.

BACKGROUND

This section provides information concerning the context of the study; historical, political and cultural information; the need for the study, and significance of the research. It may include a discussion of policy, personal motivation, and a theoretical underpinning of your research.

SYNOPSIS OF THE LITERATURE

A critical discussion and synthesis of the key ideas and references from the literature that underpin the proposed study, which draws the research question and objectives out of the literature. Candidates are encouraged to use research office online resources and professional development workshops designed for developing the literature review. This section of your Research Proposal should be substantial, show your depth of understanding of the literature, and your resulting research question(s).

GAP IN KNOWLEDGE

In this section you should identify the current gaps in knowledge and the contribution to new knowledge that your research will aim to make.

RESEARCH QUESTION /SUB-QUESTIONS

Your overall research question/ and sub-questions should identify the significant issue or problem that your research project will investigate.

HYPOTHESIS / PROPOSITION

If applicable, state briefly and clearly the hypotheses or propositions that underpin the research. Your research proposal may have a number of hypotheses or propositions.

METHODOLOGY

A description of how the research will be undertaken through specific research methods and strategies that fit within a methodological framework. Clearly describe the research design, provide rationale of why the methods have been chosen and the procedure/technique that you will follow to conduct the research. References should be included for all the selected research methods. This includes, for example, qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, study population, sampling strategy, design, and creative practice.

DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

Describe the type of data your research will produce, justify why the unit of analysis you have determined will be appropriate and how you plan to analyse it. If statistical analysis is part of the project, indicate whether the designs have been discussed with a statistician.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

If you are doing research involving humans 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

See [Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics web page](#)

DATA MANAGEMENT AND STORAGE PLAN

The Data Management and Storage Plan will help you to understand the principles of good research data management, together with its benefits and responsibilities as detailed in the [Charles Sturt University Research Data Management Policy](#).

The [Data management and storage plan](#), if required, will need to accompany your research proposal when it is submitted.

TECHNICAL, EQUIPMENT, FACILITIES, STUDIO REQUIREMENTS

Any requirements for specialised resources should be listed here.

TIMETABLE

Provide an outline of the major activities and a timeline for their completion. You will need to show how this project can realistically be completed within the timeframe for the specified degree.

PROPOSED RESEARCH STRUCTURE

This should set out the overall structure of the thesis, dividing it into chapters, together with the proposed focus of each chapter. A small paragraph concerning each chapter is sufficient.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES / IMPACT OF THE STUDY

This is simply a description or a prediction of the expected outcomes/impact of your research.

GLOSSARY

List terms and their meanings specific to your area of research, in particular, acronyms, culturally-specific terms, and key concepts specific to your discipline.

APPENDICES

Documents that are relevant to the text of the research proposal, however, they may otherwise clutter rather than enhance the main text document.

REFERENCES

References that you have identified in the literature review and in developing the proposal need to be presented using the referencing style appropriate to the discipline, as advised by the Supervisor.

Appendix 1: Research Proposal – Reviewer’s Report

Faculty of Arts & Education Research Proposal - Reviewer’s Report	
Reviewer’s Name:	
Candidate’s Name:	
Student ID:	
Course: (e.g. PhD)	
Title of Study:	
Date of Seminar:	
Recommendation: (Please check recommendation with X)	
A	The research proposal is endorsed without any amendments.
B	The research proposal be endorsed, subject to amendments.
C	The research proposal is not endorsed and the candidate be required to undertake further work to develop a revised proposal. The proposal must be presented at another seminar presentation.
D	In the case of a resubmitted research proposal, if the proposal is not endorsed the candidate be required to show cause as to why their candidature should be continued.
Note to reviewer: Please provide comments and recommendations reflecting your evaluation of the candidate’s proposal.	
1. The candidate is working on a significant/important research issue.	
Comments:	
Recommendations:	
2. The candidate demonstrates a critical and detailed knowledge and understanding of the relevant literature, and theoretical framework, where appropriate.	
Comments:	
Recommendations:	
3. The candidate develops a clear and focused research question, and hypothesis where relevant.	
Comments:	
Recommendations:	

4. The methods and techniques adopted are appropriate to the topic and the candidate justifies the choice convincingly.	
Comments:	
Recommendations:	
5. The candidate demonstrates that the research will make an original and significant contribution to knowledge or understanding and/or professional practice	
Comments:	
Recommendations:	
6. The proposal demonstrates a sufficiently high standard of literary quality	
Comments:	
Recommendations:	
7. Detail any ethical risks inherent to the project that have not been considered by the candidate	
Comments:	
Recommendations:	
8. The candidate outlines a clear and realistic timeline for the project	
Comments:	
Recommendations:	
9. Are there any other issues with the proposal or proposed research that you consider need to be addressed at this stage?	
Comments:	
10. Are you confident that the candidate has the capacity to complete in the minimum period?	
Comments:	

Appendix 2: 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.

Prof. XXX's comments	Corrections/Responses, including page numbers
1. The title being misleading	It was changed to "...".
2. Including the prediction of the Rescorla- Wagner (R-W) model for the data presented.	<p>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.</p>
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. The candidate should consult this work and discuss its significance to this research project.	<p>I agree with Prof. XXX that the work by Matute and her colleagues are 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. 11. "On the other hand, Matute and Pineno argued that a within-compound association is not always necessary for cue competition."</p>
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?	<p>On pg.23, 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)."</p>
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?	<p>This was addressed in the response to A/Prof YYY's comments (2).</p>