

Higher Degrees by Research Procedure 3 Pre-Candidature and Candidature

Section 1 - Purpose / Objectives

(1) Nil

Section 2 - Scope / Application

(2) This Procedure outlines standard, reduction to standard duration and maximum duration, extensions, advanced candidature, Higher Degrees by Research (HDR) required coursework, progression from pre-candidature to candidature, changes to and reinstatement of candidature.

Section 3 - Definitions

(3) Higher Degree by Research (HDR)

Section 4 - Policy Statement

(4) Refer to [Higher Degrees by Research Policy](#).

Section 5 - Procedures

Part A - Period of candidature in Higher Degrees by Research

Pre-Candidature and candidature

(5) All successful applicants in the research phase of a HDR at Victoria University (VU) are initially enrolled on a provisional basis in their HDR course, known as the Pre-Candidature phase of enrolment.

(6) During the Pre-Candidature phase candidates complete any required coursework (where applicable), undertake initial research towards their thesis project, and prepare for candidature confirmation.

(7) Candidates enrolment in their HDR degree is regarded as confirmed when their candidature and research proposals receive final approval at Confirmation of Candidature.

(8) Candidature, once approved by the College Review Panel (which may, where relevant, include representation from a Centre or Institute), is deemed to have commenced from the date of initial enrolment in the respective degree.

Standard and maximum duration of Higher Degrees by Research

Masters by research degrees

(9) As stipulated in the [Australian Quality Framework \(AQF\) Guidelines](#), Masters by Research candidates have typically one to two years EFT in which to complete their degree. The timeframe given is dependent on the volume of learning acquired prior to enrolment in the Masters by Research as outlined below:

- a. in same discipline - 1.5 years following a Level 7 qualification (Bachelor Degree);
- b. in same discipline - one year following a Level 8 qualification (Bachelor Degree with Honours, Graduate Certificate or Graduate Diploma);
- c. in a different discipline - two years following a Level 7 qualification (Bachelor Degree);
- d. in a different discipline - 1.5 years following a Level 8 qualification (Bachelor Degree with Honours, Graduate Certificate or Graduate Diploma).

(10) Once a Masters by Research candidate reaches 1.5 EFT duration, their candidature will be monitored closely and candidates will be required to apply for up to two, three-month extensions to their Candidature.

(11) The maximum duration for Master by Research Candidates is two years, however some candidates may submit at one year EFT given their prior volume of learning.

Doctoral degrees

(12) Doctoral research candidates have a standard duration of three years EFT within which to complete their degree.

(13) Doctoral candidates may apply for up to two, six-month EFT extensions to their Candidature. The maximum duration for a doctoral degree is four years EFT.

Reduction to standard duration

(14) The University recognises that some candidates may have demonstrated exceptional research skills, have completed all the requirements of their degree and are ready to submit their thesis prior to the standard duration of their degree.

(15) A candidate may submit their thesis 12 months EFT or more before their standard duration expires by requesting approval from the relevant College Director, Research Training (and, where applicable, the relevant Centre/Institute Director). The following documentation must be submitted to the GRC for approval:

- a. a copy of the thesis;
- b. a completed [Release of Thesis form](#);
- c. a detailed letter from the Principal Supervisor indicating the reasons for early submission; confirming that the thesis has been verified as being the candidate's own work.

(16) The College Support Officer (CSO) will forward the thesis and accompanying documentation to the College Director, Research Training for review.

(17) The College Director, Research Training may convene a College Review Panel (including Centre or Institute members where a student is based within a Centre or Institute) to assist with reviewing and approving an application.

(18) The candidate will be advised of the outcome via email. If the application is approved, the candidate will be required to submit the electronic and spiral bound copy to the relevant CSO and the thesis will be sent for examination once examiners are approved.

Extensions to candidature beyond standard duration

(19) Candidates must apply for an extension to candidature prior to their thesis submission date, either through:

- a. a request for an extension in the progress report; or
- b. the submission of the [Application for Extension form](#).

(20) All applications for extension must be accompanied by a supporting statement from the Principal Supervisor and a new timeline.

(21) The process to apply for an extension to a HDR scholarship is outlined in [Higher Degrees by Research Procedure 6 Scholarships](#).

Extensions to candidature beyond maximum duration

(22) Three months prior to a candidate's maximum duration date, the GRC will notify the candidate, Principal Supervisor and College Director, Research Training (and, where applicable, Centre/Institute Director) that the thesis must be lodged for examination with the GRC by the due date, otherwise the candidate is at risk of Unsatisfactory Progress Proceedings being invoked.

(23) Where a candidate expects to exceed maximum duration, an application for late submission must be lodged on the [Application for Extension form](#) with the GRC two months prior to the maximum duration due date.

(24) The application must provide strong justification for an extension and must detail the strategies to ensure the thesis is submitted within the approved extension period.

(25) If an extension is granted and the candidate fails to submit by the approved extension end date, the University will invoke Unsatisfactory Progress Proceedings against the candidate.

(26) As a general principle, the GRC will normally only approve one extension for a maximum period of 6 months EFT for candidates who reach maximum duration. The option of a further semester may be considered for a candidate who indicates extraordinary or compelling circumstances beyond their control that have interfered with them completing within the approved extension end date.

Advanced Candidature

(27) An applicant may be enrolled with Advanced Candidature if they have already achieved Candidature at another university, and have:

- a. been making satisfactory progress with that project at that university;
- b. applied and been accepted for admission to VU to continue the same project, or requested to transfer to VU with their supervisor (subject to a commencing place, resources and funding being available).

(28) Applicants may also be enrolled with Advanced Candidature if they have commenced or produced work on a documented research project prior to applying for enrolment in a PhD course, and have completed one or more papers for publication that they wish to be considered for incorporation into a PhD in the 'Thesis by Publication' format.

(29) Applicants granted Advanced Candidature must normally be enrolled for a minimum of twelve months prior to submission of the thesis for examination. In addition, there must normally be at least 12 months EFT Candidature time available before reaching the maximum duration for the research degree in which the applicant is enrolled.

(30) Applicants for Advanced Candidature must complete the [Apply for Research Form](#) with all relevant supporting documentation and submit it to the GRC for the College's consideration and confirmation.

(31) In cases where the application for Advanced Candidature involves prior research and publications not undertaken in a context of HDR enrolment, the review of the Advanced Candidature application will involve review of the academic merit and quality of the work proposed to be incorporated into the thesis submission, as well as the integrity of the PhD project overall and the suitability of each publication proposed for inclusion. The review should be at least equivalent to that used by the College concerned for Candidature Confirmation.

(32) An applicant accepted with Advanced Candidature will be admitted as a candidate immediately. Time already consumed, either through enrolment at another institution, or the equivalent amount of candidature time (for PhD incorporating prior publication/s), will be deducted from the maximum allowable duration for the respective course as outlined in clauses (9) - (13) of this procedure.

(33) An applicant accepted with Advanced Candidature will normally be granted Advanced Standing for any required coursework units on submission of an [Application for Advanced Standing form](#).

Part B - Pre-candidature: Research degrees with required coursework

Progress in required coursework

(34) At the commencement of a candidate's enrolment in a HDR course the candidate will be informed about any required coursework unit/s. The candidate must successfully complete all required coursework units to the required level to proceed to candidature confirmation and the research phase of their degree.

(35) A candidate's progress in required coursework will be monitored by the professional doctorate Course Chair for professional doctorate candidates or the GRC [HDR Coursework Chair](#) for PhD coursework candidates.

(36) If a doctoral candidate achieves an average below 70 per cent in any one or subsequent semesters the Course Chair will contact the candidate to discuss their progress and will assist in linking the candidate to available support to address their difficulties. Candidates are permitted one resubmission of a piece of assessed work in order to seek to achieve the required result. The Course Chair may also counsel the candidate as to their options, such as course discontinuation or transfer to a more suitable course.

(37) If a doctoral candidate fails to achieve an average of 70 per cent or over at the completion of their required coursework units (and after any applicable resubmission attempts), the candidate will not be able to proceed to candidature confirmation. The Course Chair will contact the candidate to discuss their progress and will counsel the candidate as to their options, either course discontinuation or transfer to a more suitable course. If a candidate does not accept the option(s) proposed, Unsatisfactory Progress Proceedings will be commenced.

(38) On completion of all required coursework and achievement of the required average of 70 per cent across the required units, a candidate will proceed with the research component of the same degree.

Progression to the research component

(39) Professional doctorate candidates who are reaching the conclusion of the required coursework component of their research degree and believe that they will meet the requirements to proceed to the research component, must submit an [Application for Progression to the Research Component of a Professional Doctorate form](#) to their Course Chair.

(40) If the application is approved by the Course Chair, the College/Centre/Institute and the GRC will be advised and the candidate is considered to have commenced the Pre-candidature research phase of their degree on the date that the approval is lodged with the GRC. The candidate's Candidature Confirmation process will proceed as per clauses (46) to (53) in this procedure.

(41) PhD candidates who have completed the required coursework component of their research degree must submit an [Application for Confirmation of Candidature form](#) to their CSO once they are ready to present and following

consultation with their supervisory team.

Part C - Progression from Pre-Candidature to Candidature

(42) Once accepted for admission into the research component of an HDR course (either directly or as per clauses (34 to 41 above), a candidate will participate in required induction program/s, work with their supervisors to plan their research project and prepare a Candidature application and proposal according to the [Confirmation of Candidature Guidelines](#).

(43) The outline of the planned research project, incorporating resources required and a timeline, will be presented to the College in which the candidate is enrolled, within six months Equivalent Full Time (EFT) of their enrolment in the research component of their course.

Pre-Candidature extension

(44) The Pre-Candidature phase may be extended for a clearly defined additional period when one or more of the following unanticipated difficulties have been experienced during this phase:

- a. disruption to supervisory support arrangements (eg, need to change supervisor/s; unanticipated absence of supervisor/s);
- b. change in focus and direction of proposed project;
- c. revision required in the review process leading up to presentation for candidature;
- d. difficulties in scheduling of Candidature Confirmation deliberations and/or in convening a suitable confirmation panel;
- e. documented personal illness or other serious personal difficulties;
- f. other unforeseen disruptions beyond the candidate's control that have directly impacted on their capacity to prepare for Candidature.

(45) A candidate must complete and lodge the [Application for Extension form](#) with the GRC two months prior to their expected candidature confirmation date if additional time is required to prepare for confirmation of candidature. The CSO will notify the candidate in writing of the outcome of their application.

Confirmation of Candidature process

(46) Each candidate will be provided with the [Application for Confirmation of Candidature](#) and [Confirmation of Candidature Guidelines](#) as well as the [Supervision Agreement](#) when they are preparing for Confirmation.

(47) The process for Confirmation of Candidature will include careful scrutiny of the following:

- a. a detailed research proposal including literature review, methodology, proposed analysis and thesis format;
- b. a detailed budget outlining the resources required for the project.

(48) The College Review Panel will take into consideration:

- a. the academic merit, feasibility and viability of the proposed project in relation to the degree for which the candidate is applying to be a candidate;
- b. the capacity of the College/Centre/Institute to ensure that adequate supervision, resources and infrastructure are available to support the proposed project;
- c. the capacity of the candidate to undertake the project successfully:
 - i. in the format proposed;
 - ii. within the time frame stipulated for the degree for which the candidate is applying to be a candidate; and

iii. with the enrolment time fraction proposed.

(49) A candidate must also satisfy the College Review Panel that he or she is able to devote the time necessary for completion of the course in accordance with the time fraction in which they are enrolled.

(50) The College Review Panel may:

- a. reject the proposal;
- b. endorse it outright; or
- c. endorse it subject to changes being made.

(51) Candidates who fail to achieve candidature will have one opportunity to resubmit.

(52) Confirmation of Candidature is provisionally approved by the relevant College Review Panel once the candidate has met the criteria, including making any changes required by the Panel.

(53) Final approval lies with the College Director, Research Training and, where a candidate is based within a Centre or Institute, the Centre/Institute Director.

Failure to obtain Confirmation of Candidature

(54) If a candidate fails their second attempt to obtain Confirmation of Candidature, the candidate will be counselled about alternative study options and discontinuation from the course. If the candidate does not discontinue their enrolment, the University will provide notice in writing of its intention to discontinue their enrolment after 20 University business days.

(55) Where an international candidate has failed to obtain candidature, the GRC will advise Victoria University International (VUI) that their Confirmation of Enrolment will need to be cancelled and, if the candidate is sponsored, their sponsor must be notified that their candidature will be discontinued after 20 University business days due to failure to have candidature confirmed.

Part D - Changes to candidature

Change in research direction

(56) Minor changes to research projects do not require college review and approval, but must be discussed and negotiated with the supervisory team.

(57) A significant change in the direction of a research project post-candidature requires a new research proposal to be submitted to the GRC for consideration by the relevant College. Significant changes include:

- a. a major change to the project plan;
- b. a major change in resourcing and/or support needs;
- c. a change in academic supervision for the new research direction.

(58) The University will need to consider whether the project remains viable and feasible within the timeframe. The College/Centre/Institute will be required to determine whether they are still able to support the project with resourcing and supervision.

Conversions between course type and level

Conversion from doctoral to masters by research degree

(59) A candidate may apply for their candidature to be converted from a doctoral to a masters by research degree under certain circumstances, such as:

- a. they are unable to continue in the course, but have completed sufficient work to be able to prepare a masters by research thesis submission;
- b. a review of progress leads to agreement that the candidate's work is not at a doctoral level, but is considered of sufficient quality to merit submission and examination for a masters by research degree.

(60) The application for conversion must be made to the GRC for consideration by the College/Centre/Institute using the [Application for Conversion of a Research Degree form](#).

(61) If the candidate has been on a scholarship for more than two years EFT, the scholarship will cease immediately on conversion to a masters by research degree.

Conversion between professional doctorate and PhD

(62) A candidate may apply to convert to a professional doctorate from a PhD or from a PhD to a professional doctorate in colleges where both types of research doctorates are offered. This is done by lodging an Application for Conversion of a Research Degree form with the GRC for consideration by the relevant College/Centre/Institute.

(63) The difference in the nature of the research proposed between the two degrees should be made apparent in the application for conversion submission. The request must be supported by the Principal Supervisor. The College Director, Research Training and Centre/Institute member where a candidate is based in a Centre or Institute) (with input from a College Academic Panel if required), is responsible for approving the conversion.

(64) If a candidate is approved for conversion to PhD on completion of their Professional Doctorate Coursework, they will be granted advanced standing for the required coursework units providing a formal application for advanced standing is submitted.

Conversion from Masters by Research to a doctoral degree

(65) A candidate may apply to have their candidature converted from Masters by Research to a doctoral degree provided:

- a. candidature has been approved in the masters by research degree;
- b. the candidate is no more than 12 months EFT into their Masters by Research degree;
- c. the candidate's supervisors support the application for conversion and agree that the progress meets the designated criteria for doctoral level work;
- d. the candidate is judged by the College Director, Research Training, with input as appropriate from supervisors and a review panel, to have:
 - i. demonstrated exceptional ability and achievement in the first stages of the masters by research degree;
 - ii. a research project with the capacity to be developed and extended to a level that makes it suitable in breadth and depth for doctoral-level research.

(66) The demonstration of exceptional ability and achievement should take into account elapsed EFT in the masters by research at the time as well as the progress with the masters project, both in terms of the quantity and quality of work achieved against the confirmed project plan. Normally this would include draft chapter/s or publishable level article/s based on the research to date.

(67) Application for conversion is made to the GRC for consideration by the College/Centre/Institute using the

[Application for Conversion of a Research Degree form.](#)

(68) Where a candidate commences studies in a masters by research degree and then converts to a doctoral degree, they are entitled to a maximum of four years EFT, including the time enrolled in the masters by research degree. There is no guarantee that the category in which the candidate was enrolled in the masters by research (RTS, fee-paying etc) will transfer to the doctoral degree.

(69) Where a candidate converts from a masters by research to a PhD, their progress and the nature of their project will be assessed to determine whether advanced standing is granted for one or more of the PhD coursework units and will be negotiated and approved by the HDR Coursework Chair.

(70) International candidates who are approved for conversion must contact VUI so that a new Confirmation of Enrolment can be issued. The GRC will then enrol the candidate in the new course.

Reinstatement of candidature

(71) A candidate must have a continuous enrolment for the duration of their candidature. Failure to re-enrol by the census date will result in candidature lapsing and the candidate will be required to apply for reinstatement of candidature.

(72) A person whose candidature has lapsed; been discontinued by the University; or who has voluntarily discontinued, may apply to be reinstated within three years of their last enrolment for the purpose of continuing their previous project, or a revised version of their previous project.

(73) In exceptional circumstances, reinstatement may also be considered for a candidate whose enrolment has been discontinued by the University through Unsatisfactory Progress Proceedings.

(74) The application for all candidates who seek to have their candidature reinstated must be made on the [Application for Reinstatement of Candidature form](#).

(75) The decision about reinstatement of candidature will be made by the relevant College Director, Research Training (with input from the relevant Centre/Institute Director where applicable), taking into consideration:

- a. the nature of the circumstances that led to the cessation or suspension of candidature and the strength of the case made for why the applicant should be permitted to recommence their candidature, including the likelihood of this leading to a successful outcome;
- b. the continuing academic merit, feasibility and viability of the proposed (and revised) project;
- c. the capacity of the College to ensure that adequate supervision, resources and infrastructure are available to support the project;
- d. the capacity of the applicant to undertake the project successfully within the time frame stipulated, requested or deemed to be available.

Conflict of Roles

(76) No individual may be involved in dual or multiple roles. Where the potential for a conflict of roles exists the following alternate delegations will normally apply:

- a. For College Director, Research Training who is also the Principal Supervisor - The Dean from the College (or their nominee, normally a senior academic).
- b. For College Director, Research Training of the College in which the candidate is enrolled — College Director, Research Training of another College.
- c. For Centre or Institute Director who is also the Principal Supervisor - Director from another Centre or Institute.

d. For the Dean, Graduate Research - Pro Vice Chancellor Research Training or nominee.

Section 6 - Guidelines

(77) Nil

Status and Details

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Glossary Terms and Definitions

"Higher Degree by Research (HDR)" - A Higher Degree by Research (HDR) is a postgraduate award at Master or Doctoral level at AQF 9 or 10 respectively, of which two thirds or more is research and research training. The major part of assessment of these courses must be in the form of reporting the outcomes of a research project/s conducted as the research component of the degree. A HDR may also include a coursework component, which is one or more accredited units of study designed to address and area(s) of content and/or skill development within the HDR program.