

# Higher Degrees by Research Candidature - Procedures

## 1. Purpose of procedures

1.1 These procedures describe components and requirements of higher degree by research (HDR) candidature.

## 2. Scope and application

2.1 These procedures apply to all Doctoral degrees and Research Master degrees. They apply to all candidates enrolled in, or proposing to enrol in, a HDR program.

2.2 These procedures apply to all staff working in the HDR environment at the University.

2.3 These procedures, together with the Higher Degree by Research Thesis Submission and Examination – Procedures and the Higher Degree by Research Supervision – Procedures support the Higher Degree by Research – Academic Policy.

2.4 These procedures are supported by the following guidelines:

- Higher Degree by Research Admission - Guidelines
- Higher Degree by Research Candidature Progression – Guidelines
- Higher Degree by Research Support Grant – Guidelines
- Higher Degree by Research Independent Academic Reviews – Guidelines
- Higher Degree by Research Candidature Resources and Support - Guidelines
- Higher Degree by Research Industry Engagement and Internships - Guidelines

## 3. Definitions

Refer to the University's Glossary of Terms for policies and procedures. Terms and definitions identified below are specific to these procedures and are critical to its effectiveness:

Candidate - a person admitted to a HDR program at the university (also known as a "student").

Candidature means duration of enrolment in a HDR program. An HDR student is considered to be a "candidate" for the HDR program in which they are enrolled. All research and related work towards fulfilment of the requirements for a HDR must be completed during enrolled candidature.

Confirmed candidature - period of enrolment in a HDR program after the successful completion of the Confirmation of Candidature milestone, up to the date of expiry of candidature for that program.

Co-Supervisor - a UniSC academic staff member who meets the criteria for and has been approved for registration as a UniSC HDR supervisor but has not yet supervised research candidate to successful completion of their degree.

Consultant supervisor - a person appointed to a candidate's supervision panel who does not meet the criteria for registration as a UniSC HDR Supervisor, usually external to the university.

Creative work - an original product designed, created, or constructed by a candidate during candidature deriving from one or more of the creative arts including graphical and new media techniques.

Exegesis - a scholarly, critical commentary on the original creative work in dialogue with, and informing that original work or collection of works, resulting from research undertaken and produced during candidature. The exegesis also includes explicit reference to the research methodologies employed in the creation of the original creative work.

Exit Statement – a statement of enrolment details as of the date of withdrawal or discontinuation

### APPROVAL AUTHORITY

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation)

### RESPONSIBLE EXECUTIVE MEMBER

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation)

### DESIGNATED OFFICER

Dean, Graduate Research

### FIRST APPROVED

29 July 2014

### LAST AMENDED

20 February 2023

### REVIEW DATE

21 February 2028

### STATUS

Active

Head of Enrolling Unit - the Head of School or Director of Institute of a candidate's enrolment.

Leave of Absence - is a period of approved leave from the HDR program that will suspend consumption of candidature and will adjust future milestone due dates..

Milestones are program requirements and periodic assessments of candidature progression including (but not limited to) Induction, Research Ethics and Integrity Training, Initial Plan and Progress Review, Conditions of Candidature, Confirmation of Candidature, subsequent Plan and Progress Reviews, Intention to Submit Thesis, Final Thesis Presentation, and Thesis Submission.

Monitored candidature - candidature that is placed under three-monthly review after being identified as not making satisfactory progress (or being at risk of not making satisfactory progress). Monitored candidature is designed to provide intensive support to a candidate to support achievement of their research goals and candidature milestones within maximum durations of candidature.

Principal Supervisor - a UniSC academic staff member who meets the criteria for and has been approved for registration as a UniSC Principal HDR supervisor. A registered principal supervisor may join an individual candidate's supervision panel as the candidate's principal supervisor or as a co-supervisor. Refer to the HDR Supervision – Procedures for a detailed description of a principal supervisor's roles and responsibilities.

Probationary candidature - period of enrolment in a HDR program up to and including the successful completion of the Confirmation of Candidature milestone, or the date of expiry of probationary candidature for that program (whichever comes first).

Significant research component - completed courses that aim to develop research skills and/or completion of a supervised research project that includes an individually assessed written report. Combined, these must be equivalent to a minimum of 24 units at USC.

Standard Leave – periods of leave included in the original program structure that will not suspend consumption of candidature and will not adjust future milestone due dates.

Candidates are entitled to up to two (2) weeks per year of medical leave and up to four (4) weeks of personal leave per full-time equivalent year of candidature.

Study Load means the total units in which the candidate is enrolled in a determined study period. HDR candidates may undertake the degree with a full-time (48 units per semester) or part-time study load (24 units per semester)

Study Mode - the location of a candidate's research that is whether it will be undertaken on a UniSC campus or at an external location

Thesis - an original substantial piece of scholarly writing resulting from research undertaken by a candidate and produced during candidature to meet the requirements of the degree.

## 4. Admissions

This section should be read in conjunction with the Higher Degrees by Research Admission and Enrolment – Guidelines.

### 4.1 Entry to Doctoral degrees

4.1.1 To be eligible for admission to a doctoral degree, an applicant must hold:

- (a) a Bachelor Honours degree (AQF Level 8) with a significant research component with a minimum of Class IIA from a recognised higher education institution; or
- (b) a Master's degree (AQF Level 9) with a significant research component from a recognised higher education institution; or
- (c) a Bachelor degree (AQF Level 7) from a recognised higher education institution, and a record of research experience equivalent to the standard of (a) or (b) as determined by the Research Degrees Committee, or the Chairperson acting on behalf of the Committee; or
- (d) a record of research experience or professional qualifications equivalent to the standard of (a) or (b) as determined by the Research Degrees Committee, or the Chairperson acting on behalf of the Committee.

- If applying for admission to a doctoral degree under 4.1.1.c), applicants must provide evidence of research experience in at least one of the following ways: Scholarly papers involving a substantial contribution as an author, appearing in recognised academic journals or in volumes published by recognised academic publishers. Research or technical reports prepared for industry, government, or business, which adhere to the broad conventions of academic publishing (i.e., contain an up-to-date review of relevant literature, a description of relevant research methods and an evaluation of results, etc.) and which identify the candidate as a significant contributor. A portfolio of published creative work together with published critical discussion of some or all that work, or of a comparable body of work by others, and which demonstrates the candidate's development of a scholarly approach to creative work as research investigation. Demonstrable industry or work experience where the candidate can demonstrate that they have planned and executed a project, working with a high level of independence.

4.1.3 In addition to these doctoral entry requirements, an applicant for admission to the Doctor of Philosophy in creative arts must:

(a) provide a portfolio containing evidence of the applicant's own original work which is assessed by the Head of the Enrolling Unit, as providing evidence of very high levels of creativity, knowledge, and skill in one or more creative areas.

#### 4.2 Entry to Research Master degrees

4.2.1 To be eligible for admission to a Research Master degree, an applicant shall hold:

(a) a Bachelor degree (AQF Level 7) with a Grade Point Average of 5.0 or higher on a seven-point scale from a recognised higher education institution in an area of study relevant to the discipline area of the proposed Master degree; or

(b) a Bachelor Honours degree (AQF Level 8) Class IIB from a recognised higher education institution in an area of study relevant to the discipline area of the proposed Master degree; or

(c) a record of research experience or professional qualifications equivalent to the standard of (a) or (b) as determined by the Research Degrees Committee, or the Chairperson acting on behalf of the Committee.

4.2.2 Research Master degree programs may include additional eligibility requirements, specific to the discipline, which will be noted on the program's information page on the University website.

#### 4.3 English language proficiency requirements

4.3.1 Demonstrated proficiency in the English language is required for entry to all programs and courses. The University's requirements are published on the UniSC website.

#### 4.3. Admission decision

4.5 The Head of Enrolling Unit or delegate will make a recommendation to the Dean, Graduate Research, who has the final decision-making authority for all decisions relating to admission to HDR candidature.

4.6 The Dean, Graduate Research has the authority to decline an application for admission.

4.6.1 An applicant previously enrolled in an HDR on the same or a similar topic at this or another institution who has failed the examination for the degree will not normally be admitted as a candidate.

4.6.2 An applicant who has been denied admission will be advised in writing of that decision and the reason for it.

### 5. Standard of academic and research conduct

5.1 Candidates are expected to undertake their program in accordance with the accepted standards of academic conduct, including the Responsible Research Conduct – Governing Policy and the Student Conduct - Governing Policy. Any form of conduct that is contrary to these standards is misconduct and may be investigated and if proven, penalised under the relevant policy. The Responsible Research Conduct – Governing Policy applies to all research activities. The Candidate Conduct – Governing Policy applies to formal coursework components of a HDR.

### 6. Candidature resources, support, and services

6.1 HDR candidates are provided with essential information to undertake their HDR and to develop their research and transferable skills by their supervision panel, their enrolling unit and the Graduate Research School. Further information is provided:

- HDR Support Grant – Guidelines
- Graduate Research Development Program (via the Candidate Portal)
- Graduate Research at UniSC webpage

6.2 Commencing candidates are provided with HDR induction which includes information about the expectations and responsibilities of supervisors and candidates, the degree requirements, progress procedures, research integrity and ethics, intellectual property, grievance procedures, health and safety procedures and the availability of resources and support services. In addition:

- international candidates commencing candidature are provided with an International Candidate Orientation;
- candidates utilising specialist equipment such as laboratories participate in relevant specific inductions as advised by their Principal Supervisor; and
- commencing candidates must participate in all relevant induction and orientation sessions as advised by their enrolling unit and the Graduate Research School.

### 7. Candidature

This section should be read in conjunction with the Higher Degrees by Research Candidature Progression – Guidelines.

#### 7.1 Study Load

7.1.1 Candidates will be enrolled as full-time or part-time candidates.

[usc.edu.au/policy](http://usc.edu.au/policy)

University of the Sunshine Coast | CRICOS Provider Number: 01595D | Correct as at 28 January 2025  
Hard copies of this document are uncontrolled and may not be current.



7.1.2 Full-time candidates will be enrolled for 48 units per semester and are expected to spend the equivalent of a standard working week on their study.

7.1.3 Part-time candidates will be enrolled for 24 units per semester and are expected to spend the equivalent of 50% of a standard working week on their study.

## 7.2 Study Mode

7.2.1 All applicants are admitted with an Internal/On-campus study mode, unless noted otherwise in their Letter of Offer.

7.2.2 If required, an applicant can request approval for an External/Remote study mode. If the request is supported by the Head of the Enrolling Unit, it may be approved by the Dean, Graduate Research.

7.2.3 The Dean, Graduate Research may set conditions on minimum periods of attendance at the University.

## 7.3 Concurrent Enrolment

7.3.1 A candidate enrolled in a HDR may not undertake concurrent coursework study in any program at this or other higher education institution without the permission of Dean, Graduate Research.

7.3.2 A candidate enrolled in an HDR may not undertake concurrent HDR study in any program at this or other higher education institution.

## 7.4 Extensions

7.4.1 In the event that a Candidate anticipates being unable to complete the requirements of their degree within their period of candidature they may request an extension.

7.4.2 The Dean, Graduate Research is the approving authority for extensions to candidature.

## 7.5 Leave of absence

7.5.1 A Leave of Absence is a period of approved leave from the HDR program that will suspend consumption of candidature and will adjust future milestone due dates.

7.5.1.1 The Candidate's Principal Supervisor is the approval authority for Leave of Absence request.

7.5.2 Candidates may not undertake research, study or creative work related to the degree during a period of approved leave.

# 8. Milestones

This section should be read in conjunction with the Higher Degrees by Research Candidature Progression – Guidelines and the Higher Degrees by Research Independent Academic Reviews - Guidelines.

8.1 Candidates are required to maintain satisfactory progress towards completion of their program which can be demonstrated via the attainment of milestones. Achieving each milestone supports:

- (a) candidate academic development and progress;
- (b) resource allocation (including but not limited to supervisory commitments); and
- (c) quality assurance.

8.2 Each milestone includes formal and recorded interactions between the candidate and the supervisory team. Milestone components are open to the external scrutiny of members of the wider research community.

8.3 The format for each milestone must be compliant with the HDR Candidature Progression - Guidelines. There may be discipline-specific requirements as well, but this is at the discretion of the Enrolling Unit and will be communicated to candidates by the enrolling unit. In general, each milestone is comprised of work completed by the candidate which is assessed by the enrolling unit and recorded by the Graduate Research School on the candidate record. The candidate will receive feedback during or at the completion of each milestone.

8.4 Enrolling units must ensure that candidates receive appropriate support from their supervisory teams prior to and during each milestone.

8.5 Candidates will be graded and/or provided with feedback on each completed milestone.

8.5.1 Candidates whose progress is de

8.6 Where a candidate has not submitted a milestone or a request for variation to candidature within:

(a) three (3) months FTE of the milestone due date for the PhD; or

(b) one (1) month FTE of the milestone due date for Master by Research

the Graduate Research School will record an “unsatisfactory” result for the milestone and will subsequently invite the candidate to show cause as to why their candidature should not be discontinued (refer to section 14).

8.7 In the event that a candidate anticipates being unable to meet a milestone due date they may request an extension within the limits of their maximum candidature duration.

8.7.1 The principal supervisor is the approving authority for milestone extensions.

## 9. Transfer between higher degree by research degrees

9.1 To transfer between programs, candidates must submit an application for admission for the relevant program.

9.2 If the candidate is accepted into the new program they will be withdrawn from their previous program.

9.3 Successful candidates will receive a new Letter of Offer which will detail their period of candidature.

9.4 Successful candidates will be admitted to their new program as Probationary candidates and required to complete Confirmation of Candidature.

9.5 Unsuccessful candidates will remain in their current program.

## 10. Thesis title and research topic

10.1 Candidates include a thesis title on their application for admission and this is recorded in UniSC's candidate management system.

10.2 With the approval of the Principal Supervisor, a candidate may change the title of their thesis.

10.3 An applicant's enrolling Unit will determine a research topic (Field of Education and Field of Research) at the time of admission.

## 11. Supervision Panel

11.1 Candidates will be supported by a minimum of two HDR Supervisors. Both supervisors must be current members of UniSC's Register of HDR Supervisors and one must meet the criteria for registration as a Principal Supervisor.

11.2 Refer to the Higher Degrees by Research Supervision – Procedures for more information on the requirements of HDR supervision panels.

## 12. Publication

12.1 If a HDR supervisor wishes to use any component of a candidate's research (including data collected, materials presented in a thesis or throughout candidature) for further outputs after completion of the HDR, the supervisor(s) must make every effort to seek approval from the former HDR candidate to do so.

12.1.1 If the candidate cannot be contacted, in accordance with the Authorship and Dissemination of Research Findings – Procedures, the supervisors can put a case forward to the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation) for a research output to proceed provided there are no grounds to believe that the candidate would have objected to being included as an author. Each request will be considered by the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation) on a case-by-case basis.

12.1.2 Note section 12.1.1 does not apply in the case of Creative Works, such as literary works, artworks, audio-visual presentations, or performance rights.

12.2 Candidates are encouraged to seek independent legal advice before signing an agreement to assign their intellectual property to the University.

12.2.1 Supervisors and candidates are required to follow all relevant University policies and procedures including the Intellectual Property: Candidate IP – Procedures and the Authorship and Dissemination of Research Findings – Procedures.

## 13. Withdrawal from candidature

13.1 Candidates may voluntarily withdraw from their HDR program.

13.2 Withdrawals prior to the relevant census date will be backdated to the last day of the previous term.

13.3 Candidates will receive an Exit Statement with details about their consumption of candidature.

## 14. Show Cause and Discontinuation of HDR Candidature

14.1 A candidate may be invited to Show Cause as to why their HDR Candidature should continue in the following circumstances:

- (a) Unsatisfactory outcome recorded because of a missed milestone – as described in the HDR Candidature Progression – Guidelines.
- (b) Unsatisfactory outcome of a Progress Report – as described in the HDR Candidature Progression – Guidelines.
- (c) Unsatisfactory outcome of Confirmation of Candidature – as described in the HDR Candidature Progression – Guidelines.
- (d) Candidature Review process initiated by the enrolling unit - as described in the HDR Candidature Progression – Guidelines.

14.2 In such circumstances, the Dean, Graduate Research will notify the candidate and invite them to Show Cause, setting out the following:

- (a) the candidature background and the circumstances that have arisen which warrant a review of their HDR candidature at this time; and
- (b) options for the candidate to be heard in relation to this matter and whether their HDR Candidature should continue or be discontinued.

14.2.1 The Graduate Research School, on behalf of the Dean, Graduate Research, will email the Show Cause invitation to the candidate using their registered student email address and their registered alternate email address.

14.3 A candidate who has been issued a Show Cause invitation may submit a Response within 10 business days of receiving the Show Cause invitation.

14.3.1 A Response to Show Cause may be in writing to and/or by interview with the Dean, Graduate Research.

(a) A written response should include:

- (i) A statement from the candidate including obstacles to progression and why their HDR Candidature should continue;
- (ii) A project plan demonstrating their capacity to complete their program requirements in a timely manner;
- (iii) Supporting documents, if applicable (i.e., Medical certificate);

(b) An interview with the Dean, Graduate Research must be requested within the above-mentioned 10 business days to schedule the meeting (which can occur after the 10-business day period);

(ii) The candidate can bring a support person or an advocate to the interview, noting that an advocate must not be legally trained.

14.3.2 A candidate may seek assistance in developing a Response to Show Cause from:

(b) Student Guild – Advocacy Service can assist candidates in need of support with matter that may impact their academic progress.

14.3.3 A candidate Response to Show Cause is considered a Step 2 Review application under the Student Reviews and Appeals – Procedures. A Response to Show Cause must be submitted via the Student grievance resolution webpage, including to request a meeting with the Dean, Graduate Research under 14.3.1(b).

14.3.4 If no response has been received after 10 business days the Graduate Research School will make a reasonable attempt to contact the candidate via the phone number recorded on the candidate's record to notify them that they have been invited to Show Cause and provide information on their options to be heard, as described in these procedures.

14.3.5 If no response is received after 5 business days of the contact from the Graduate Research School the Dean, Graduate Research will proceed to determine the matter with the information available.

14.4 The Dean, Graduate Research will review the candidate's response and may consult with the candidate, supervision panel, HDR Coordinator, and Head of the Enrolling Unit before determining whether to:

- (a) continue HDR Candidature, noting what, if any, conditions apply; or
- (b) discontinue HDR Candidature.

14.5 The candidate will be advised in writing of the outcome within 5 business days of the decision.

14.5.1 The Graduate Research School, on behalf of the Dean, Graduate Research, will email with candidate using their registered student email address and their registered alternate email address.

14.5.2 The outcome will include:

- (a) an explanation from the Dean, Graduate Research as to how the decision was reached and the reasons for the decision;
- (b) if the decision is to Continue HDR Candidature, a description of any conditions will be included; and
- (c) if the decision is to Discontinue HDR Candidature, an Exit Statement will be included.

14.6 In the case of international candidates on a candidate visa, the University is obliged to report to the relevant Government departments cases of unsatisfactory progress which may result in the cancellation of their student visa.

14.7 Candidates who have had their HDR Candidature discontinued are not excluded from future HDR study.

14.8 A candidate who is dissatisfied with the decision can lodge an Step 3 Exclusion (Show cause) Appeal via the Student Review and Appeals university webpage.

## 15. Resolving Difficulties and Grievances

This section should be read in conjunction with the Student Grievance Resolution – Governing Policy and associated Procedures.

15.1 Where possible, candidates should work with their supervisors to resolve difficulties as soon as they arise during their candidature.

15.2 Where a candidate has been unable to resolve an issue(s) with their supervisor(s) they should continue to seek to resolve the issue(s) by working with the following people in the order presented:

- HDR coordinator for their enrolling unit;
- Head of Enrolling Unit

15.3 If a candidate is still unable to reach a satisfactory resolution through informal discussions and conciliation, they may lodge a formal grievance under the Student Grievance Resolution – Governing Policy and associated procedures via the Student grievance resolution webpage.

15.4 Candidates who have had their HDR Candidature discontinued should refer to section 14 of these Procedures for information on how to appeal the decision.

END

---

## RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Authorship and Dissemination of Research Findings - Procedures
- Higher Degree by Research Program Accreditation - Procedures
- Higher Degrees by Research - Academic Policy
- Higher Degrees by Research Scholarships - Procedures
- Higher Degrees by Research Supervision - Procedures
- Higher Degrees by Research Thesis Submission and Examination - Procedures
- Intellectual Property: Student IP - Procedures
- Managing and Investigating Breaches of Responsible Research Conduct - Procedures
- Research Training Program Scholarships - Academic Policy
- Responsible Research Conduct - Academic Policy
- Selection of Students for Commonwealth ISSP Scholarships - Procedures
- Student Complaints Resolution - Academic Policy
- Student Conduct - Governing Policy
- Student Fees and Charges - Academic Policy

## LINKED DOCUMENTS

- Higher Degrees by Research - Academic Policy

## SUPERSEDED DOCUMENTS

- Higher Degrees by Research - Procedures

## RELATED LEGISLATION / STANDARDS

- Higher Education Support Act 2003 (Cth)
- Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2018)
- Australian Qualifications Framework
- National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018
- Commonwealth Scholarships Guidelines (Research) 2017