



**Confirmation of Candidature Policy**

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**Part A: Policy**..... **1**

    1. *Purpose and Scope*.....1

    2. *Background*.....1

    3. *Definitions*.....2

    4. *Policy Content*.....2

**Part B: Procedures** ..... **5**

    1. *Procedures*.....5

**PART A: POLICY**

**1. Purpose and Scope**

This policy relates to commencing candidates in ACT post-graduate research courses (Master of Theology, Doctor of Theology, Doctor of Philosophy and Doctor of Ministry) during their first year of (or equivalent) full-time study.

*Please note that Confirmation of Candidature Policy applies to DMin students who enrolled from 2012.*

The policy is designed to establish and describe the formal process by which candidature in the above courses will be confirmed. Confirmation of Candidature must be successfully achieved for enrolment in the second full-time year (or part-time equivalent) of the degree course.

The policy will apply to Master of Theology, Doctor of Theology, Doctor of Philosophy and Doctor of Ministry candidates from the commencement of provisional candidature. Successful completion of confirmation of candidature requirements will progress a candidate from provisional to full candidature.

**2. Background**

The process established by this policy was required by the NSW Assessment Panel that met in August 2006 and modified in line with recommendations from the self-accreditation of ACT courses in 2011.

The purpose of the process is to encourage candidates in these programs to begin their research early in their candidature so as to minimise the cost of candidature by completing the degree in minimum time. This exercise will be of benefit to good candidature management. The process will set the plan of the candidature from commencement to completion and provide the basis for self-review of progress.

In addition, beginning researchers will benefit from guidance concerning publication of their work. To orient their thinking in the direction of publication they will prepare, in a preliminary fashion, a plan for possible publication of the outcomes of their research. This may be by presentation of conference papers, prior to formal lodgement of a paper for publication in a journal.

There will be four components contributing to the Confirmation of Candidature:

- (a) Successful completion of relevant Research Methods unit or seminar– to be completed within the first 12 months of full time candidature (or part-time equivalent).

- (b) A Research Plan – to be completed within the first six months of full time candidature (or part-time equivalent), setting down goals for achievement during the first year of candidature (full-time or part-time) and projecting a proposed timeline to completion. The initial goals will be unique to each candidate and should be attainable in the nominated time frame.
- (c) A Research Proposal – to be completed in the first year of full time candidature (or part-time equivalent), setting down the research case, intellectual context, research objectives and research procedures.
- (d) Identification of Possible Avenues for Publication – to be completed in the first year of full time candidature (or part-time equivalent), a list of conferences and journals in which a paper based on the research the candidate is undertaking may be presented, and identification of possible academic monograph publishers (especially in the case of a ThD and PhD thesis).

In addition, candidates will be expected to attend research colloquia convened or sponsored by their college. These meetings of academic staff and research candidates, and other academic scholars, may occur regularly or in a more ad-hoc fashion, but are expected to occur no less than four (4) times a year. It is in this context that research candidates will present their Research Proposal for feedback and suggestions for improvement. At other meetings current research issues of interest to staff and the research candidates might be considered. Research candidates are expected to continue attendance at research colloquia after their candidature has been confirmed—such attendance will be a matter on their Annual Report. If attendance has been sporadic the supervisor or the candidate will indicate why this was so.

Colloquia may take the following forms:

- (a) A meeting of higher degree by research candidates enrolled with an affiliated college and the postgraduate convenor to read and comment on papers read by candidates, staff or a visiting lecturer.
- (b) A meeting of the academic staff to which candidates and staff are invited to read papers.
- (c) A meeting of the academic staff of a number of colleges to which candidates are invited to read papers.
- (d) The DMin research cohort group (for DMin candidates).
- (e) A conference or seminar organised by the ACT or another provider to which ACT candidates are invited to read papers.

### 3. Definitions

**Research Candidates** – are students enrolled in degrees of the ACT which include a substantial research component; i.e. students enrolled in the degrees of MTh, ThD, PhD and DMin.

**Postgraduate Co-ordinator** – the academic staff member in an affiliated college who has responsibility for oversight of research student training in the college and normally represents the college at meetings of the Research and Research Studies Committee.

**Satisfactory Level of Attendance at college research colloquia** – the participation of an MTh/ThD/PhD candidate at college research colloquia will be regarded as satisfactory if the candidate has attended at least 60% of meetings of the group during the first year (full-time equivalent) of candidature.

### 4. Policy Content

#### (A) Confirmation of Candidature

- A1. Confirmation of Candidature is a formal and comprehensive process designed to encourage diligence early in the candidature, to review the progress and to plan the progress of the candidature from commencement to completion. The process aims to endorse work already accomplished and to provide support for the development of the candidate's plan for successful completion of the degree. The process provides the opportunity for positive feedback to be given on progress and emphasizes on formative evaluation by way of identification of

improvements that might be made. Successful completion of the confirmation of candidature process will move a candidate from 'provisional candidature' to 'full candidature'.

- A2. In order to confirm their candidature, commencing candidates in the MTh, ThD, PhD and DMin are required to satisfactorily complete the following tasks within the timeframes specified:
- (a) A Research Plan,
  - (b) A Research Proposal,
  - (c) An Indicative Publication Plan of possible avenues for publication, and
  - (d) A Research Methods unit/seminar where required.

It is expected that an MTh candidate who wishes to transfer to ThD or PhD candidature will only be approved to do so once their candidature has been confirmed.

- A3. Confirmation of candidature is required for full-time candidates to progress to their second year of candidature and for part-time candidates to progress to their fourth semester of candidature.
- A4. Failure to successfully confirm candidature may result in termination of candidature. In such cases the college postgraduate coordinator will make a recommendation to the Research and Research Studies Committee with a full explanation as to why the recommendation has been made. The Research and Research Studies Committee will determine continuation or termination of candidature.
- A5. Candidates whose candidature has been terminated may appeal under the ACT's Policy on Student Appeals under Research Degree Rules.

**(B) Research Plan**

- B1. Within the first six months of full time candidature (or part-time equivalent), candidates with their supervisor(s) must prepare a Research Plan identifying goals for achievement during the first twelve months of candidature and projecting a proposed timeline to completion.
- B2. The goals for achievement during the first twelve months of candidature may include such items as:
- (a) attending relevant coursework units supportive of the proposed research
  - (b) producing written reports—e.g. an annotated bibliography, a "map" of the thesis context
  - (c) preparing a literature survey with discussion
  - (d) drafting portions of the Research Proposal

Usually up to four items is sufficient but more may be listed as appropriate.

- B3. The timeline at this stage is a proposal subject to adjustment as the project progresses. Nevertheless this timeline should identify major and perhaps minor tasks and indicate expected points on the timeline for their completion. This timeline will be the basis for self-review of progress during the project and responses to items in the annual report.

**(C) Research Proposal**

- C1. Within the first twelve months of full-time candidature (two semesters full-time) or two years of part-time candidature (four semesters part-time) candidates must successfully complete RM095 Research Methods, which shall include as part of the assessment the development of a Research Proposal.
- C2. The Research Proposal shall address:
- (a) the research case,
  - (b) the intellectual context of the planned study, including an analytical review of some pertinent literature,
  - (c) the expected outcomes of the research, including any results of research to date, and

- (d) the research methods proposed to be used.
- C3. The essential aspects of the Research Proposal shall be presented at a research colloquium in the candidates sponsoring college. The presentation should be no longer than 15 minutes. The candidate and supervisor may agree to invite persons with appropriate expertise from external to the college to attend the presentation. The presentation shall be a formative evaluation of the Research Proposal, attracting diagnostic feedback to improve the content of the various sections of the proposal. The presentation provides the candidate an opportunity to crystallise his/her ideas and to receive feedback from several experienced researchers at an early stage of the work.
- C5. Following the presentation the candidate, in collaboration with the supervisor(s), shall update the proposal based on advice provided at the research colloquium.
- C6. Within one month of the presentation the candidate shall provide the research coordinator with an updated version of the proposal for consideration for confirmation of candidature.

**(D) Plan for Publication**

- D1. The supervisor(s) and candidate shall consider opportunities and avenues for publication by the candidate indicating conferences and journals in which a paper might be presented and academic monograph publishers (especially in the case of a ThD and PhD thesis).
- D2. The plan shall be submitted to the research coordinator at the same time as the updated version of the Research Proposal (see B6)—i.e. within the first two semesters of full-time candidature or the first four semesters of part-time candidature.

**(E) Confirmation of Candidature Approval Process**

- E1. Following the candidate's presentation at the research colloquium, the postgraduate coordinator shall arrange an Advisory Panel to review the final version of the research proposal. This Panel shall comprise the postgraduate coordinator, the supervisor(s), and two persons with relevant expertise from within the college or outside it. The panel is responsible for ensuring that the candidate has mastered the relevant literature, that the major research questions have been sharply defined, and that the research strategy is sound.
- E2. The coordinator shall provide Panel members with a copy of the proposal at least seven days before the meeting at which it will be considered. The Panel may meet in person or by teleconference (or equivalent) at a time and place notified by the coordinator at time of distribution of the paper. The postgraduate coordinator shall chair the meeting and arrange for recording of the agreed findings and outcome of the meeting. The candidate shall be present at the meeting of the Panel.
- E3. Following a review of the findings of the meeting by the supervisor and candidate, the supervisor shall submit to the coordinator a response to the findings of the Panel. The coordinator will draft a report to the Research and Research Studies Committee submitted through the Post-Graduate Student Administrator concerning fulfilment of requirements for confirmation of candidature
- E4. There are three possible recommendations arising from the meeting of the Panel:
- (a) that confirmation of candidature is recommended;
  - (b) that confirmation of candidature is recommended, subject to a response by the candidate to listed advice from the panel satisfactory to the research coordinator and the supervisor(s) within one month of the date of advice of sign-off of the report;
  - (c) that confirmation of candidature is not recommended—the candidate shall be directed to revise and resubmit the research proposal according to explicit instructions on additional work, a timeline and a process of review—the candidate shall formally advise the research coordinator and the student administrator of his/her acceptance or not of the directions for revision and resubmission of the research paper.

The coordinator shall advise the candidate and supervisor(s) of the Panel's outcome within five (5) working days of sign-off of the report and forward the report, along with the Research Proposal, Research Plan, and Plan for Publication, to the Post-graduate Student Administrator who will put this material before the next scheduled meeting of the Research and Research Studies Committee. Upon acceptance of the Research Proposal, Research Plan, and Plan for Publication, the Research and Research Studies Committee will grant confirmation of candidature and remove the candidate from provisional candidature status.

- E5. If a candidate receiving the outcome in E4(b) does not satisfy the research coordinator, the outcome shall be amended to that in E4(c) and the consequential directions given by the research coordinator in collaboration with the supervisor(s).
- E6. A resubmitted research proposal shall be reviewed following the steps E1 – E4 appropriately modified to account for this being a resubmitted proposal. Should outcome E4(c) recur, without preparation of a second set of revision instructions, the coordinator shall recommend to the Research and Research Studies Committee that the candidature be terminated.

## **PART B: PROCEDURES**

### **1. Procedures**

#### **(A) Research Plan**

A1. The Postgraduate Student Administrator shall email to commencing candidates [with advice to the supervisor(s)] the Goals for Achievement form according to the following schedule:

- (a) to candidates who commenced in Semester 1: in early April
- (b) to candidates who commenced in Semester 2: in early September

This document shall also be available for downloading from the ACT Website.

A2. Candidates shall arrange a meeting with their supervisor(s) to:

- (a) identify the items to be included on the Goals of Achievement form, their order and their likely time of completion during the first year of candidature; and,
- (b) project a proposed timeline for completion of the thesis showing major and perhaps minor tasks and expected points on the timeline for completion.

A3. Following the meeting with the supervisor(s) the candidate shall complete the Agreement concerning the Goals for Achievement and arrange for sign-off by the supervisor(s).

A4. The candidate shall forward the completed, signed Goals of Achievement form and the proposed timeline to the ACT Postgraduate Student Administrator and provide a copy to the supervisor(s) and college postgraduate coordinator before six months of the candidature has elapsed (i.e. by 31 August for candidates commencing Semester 1; by 31 January for candidates commencing Semester 2).

#### **(B) Research Proposal**

B1. Candidate should follow the Proposal for MTh, ThD/PhD Thesis or DMin Project template. The following is a summary of the main sections of the Research Proposal form:

- (a) *Working Title*

This should be clear, informative, succinct and unambiguous

- (b) *Proposed Word Length of Thesis*

- (c) *Research Case*

The section should demonstrate that the candidate understands and is able to define the research theme/issues/questions in terms that indicate that the research will provide insights into their understanding/resolution.

The Research Case should include an outline of:

- a description of the project as a whole
- a statement of the thesis, including propositions that the thesis will demonstrate, the main focus of the thesis, the inter-relationship among themes/questions/issues, the worthiness of the proposed research to address gaps or conflicts in present knowledge or understanding.

(d) ***Intellectual Content***

This section should contain:

- A detailed discussion of the conceptual and empirical aspects of the research.
- A comprehensive and critical literature review related to the problem situation
- An explanation of how the thesis is related to the literature or other research in the discipline.
- An account should be given of the theory(ies) that will be considered and the method(s) that will be employed in selecting, organising and analysing the material that will make-up the main body of the thesis.
- An indication of the likely sources of information, archival resources, field work, survey and other empirical data which will be necessary.
- A topical outline and the general content by areas or by chapter, with description and relationship of each to the others may be included.
- The expected contribution of the thesis to the advancement of knowledge in the relevant field of study.

(e) ***Research Outcomes***

This section should clearly demonstrate that the candidate has identified a potentially solvable or resolvable research proposal and has a plan of action whereby this will be achieved within the required time frame. It may be in the form of a general statement and/or a list of more specific aims that will lead to accomplishing the general objective. It should include a Chapter outline and timetable for completion.

(f) ***Research Method***

This section should set out the logical steps to be followed in meeting the research objective(s). The method should include an expression of why it is important to the particular research field and how the method will generate and verify the conclusions expected to be reached in the thesis.

(g) **Human Subject Research**

Where any human subject research is to be undertaken, a separate Ethics Protocol form must be completed and submitted to the ACT's Human Research Ethics Committee.

(h) **A representative bibliography and other resources to be investigated.**

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