Sydney School of Architecture, Design and Planning (SSADP) Guidelines to assist MPhil and PhD Student Candidates and Academic Staff in Confirmation of Candidature (Probationary Progress Review)

* These guidelines expand the policy contained in The University of Sydney (Higher Degree by Research) Rule 2011 and Progress Planning and Review for HDR Policy 2015. It is advisable to check the latest copy of the policy on the university website.

Note: This version of the guidelines is in draft, and will be finalized early in 2017.

Initiation of Process

1. As a general rule, students will be notified two months in advance of the need to complete the Probationary Progress Review for Confirmation of Candidature by HDRAC.

2. The Faculty is holding the Probationary Progress Review hearings in two main rounds: May for students commencing in Research Period 3 or 4, and December for Research Period 1 or 2. If a hearing cannot take place during these scheduled rounds for good reason, then an alternative day and time will be convened.

3. The hearing consists of a presentation by the candidate, followed by a progress review interview. The presentation component is open to the public. Supervisors are encouraged to attend the presentation. The progress review interview is restricted to the candidate and the Panel.

Composition of Panel

4. The Associate Dean Research Education, in consultation with the coordinating supervisor of the student, shall advise on the selection of the panel. The two panel members shall be independent advisors (they cannot be supervisors of the student, or hold any conflict of interest). The panel Chair shall be a senior academic, with significant supervision experience. At least one of the panel shall have discipline expertise related to the topic of the research proposal. The panel are responsible for assessing the progress of the candidate as passing Probation, or otherwise; with the final decision being made by the Associate Dean Research Education.
Requirements

5. The student will need to complete the online Progress Review at least 10 days prior to the scheduled Probationary hearing. With the supervisor’s endorsement, the Research Proposal and Progress Plan must be uploaded as pdf attachments.

6. If the student is wishing to apply to upgrade from an M.Phil to a PhD (or vice versa), this should be made clear in the online Progress Review completed by the student and supervisor, prior to the hearing.

7. If the student is wishing to pursue a thesis with creative work, this should be clearly stated in the Research Proposal under Methodology.

8. The supervisor shall provide their assessment of the capability of the candidate and feasibility of the research proposal, as well as any relevant information regarding the quality of the student’s dedication, effort and progress throughout the first year of candidature, through the online Progress Review system.

9. The student shall present to the Panel, on the day and time agreed, an oral and visual outline of their research proposal, which shall not exceed 20 minutes. The student shall provide hard copies of the PowerPoint (or equivalent) slides to the Panel, at the beginning of the hearing.

10. The student shall ensure that, at a minimum, the following matters are addressed in the research proposal presented in the hearing to the Panel:

   i. research title and degree for which the student is seeking candidature confirmation
   
   ii. names of student, supervisor and auxiliary supervisor(s)
   
   iii. contextual setting of topic - general theme, issues, concerns
   
   iv. key research areas of inquiry, as contained in the literature
   
   v. preliminary assessment of literature, including gaps and shortcomings
vi. research questions and research objective(s)

vii. scope of research methodology

viii. rationale of research approaches

ix. research risks, resource implications, and any mitigation strategies

x. possible new knowledge that this research will contribute/uncover

xi. any ethics applications – approved or submitted

11. The Research Proposal should not exceed 7,000-12,000 words. An Appendix may be included, which could contain research instruments such as interview questions, surveys, etc.

12. The Progress Plan shall outline the research timeframes, activities and key milestones for a 3-4 year (PhD) or 2 year (MPhil) project. It is advisable to build in some slack time, to avoid going over the maximum completion time.

13. The members of the Panel may ask questions to the student about the research proposal, and the student will be expected to respond at that time. After this stage of questioning, the supervisors and any other audience are required to leave the room.

14. During the next stage of the interview, the Panel will ask the student about their research progress, the quality of the supervisory relationship, training needs, and any other aspects related to the progress of the candidate.

15. At the conclusion of comments and questions by the members of the Panel, the student shall be excluded from the meeting and the Panel shall assess any concerns and queries raised, including the overall worthiness of the research proposal.
Decision on the Student’s Candidature

16. The Panel shall agree on a position on the Confirmation of Candidature based on the following criteria:

   i. the quality of the research proposal as presented, including ability to address any queries raised in the meeting
   
   ii. the significance of the research
   
   iii. the ability of the student to execute the proposed research
   
   iv. alignment with Faculty and discipline research goals and objectives
   
   v. any adverse resource implications including supervision capacity, and
   
   vi. any other relevant matter, including English proficiency.

17. The Panel will then make a recommendation, namely, (a) the student’s candidature be confirmed; (b) the student be asked to present in another Confirmation of Candidature meeting, or (c) the student be required to Show Good Cause, explaining why he or she should be permitted to continue the candidature. The Panel should take into account the supervisor’s comments in making the recommendation. Additional information may be sought to clarify any concerns.

18. When the student’s candidature is recommended to be confirmed contingent on modifications to the research proposal or other requirements, these shall be clearly outlined in the Progress Review report entered by the Panel Chair.

19. When the student is recommended to Show Good Cause explaining why he or she should be permitted to continue the candidature, the process as set out in the HDR Rule shall be followed.
20. The Panel Chair will enter the recommendation and report of the Panel on the Confirmation of Candidature to the online Progress Review system. In section 5.1 (Interview Details) a statement about the type of thesis to be pursued: traditional or with creative works, should be included. The report should be submitted within 3 working days of the hearing. The final approval will be made by the Associate Dean Research Education.

21. The student seeking Confirmation of Candidature shall be advised on the probation outcome via the online Progress Review system. Where the student's candidature is to be confirmed and includes required modifications, it is expected such changes by the student will be reflected in a Supplementary Progress Review.