Research Thesis Proposal Defence

Goals of Research Proposals

The aim of a research proposal is to:

- Help candidates articulate their research ideas and plans.
- Demonstrate that these research ideas are clearly defined, properly motivated, grounded in
  the literature, and conceptually sound.
- Ensure proposed models and methods are appropriate and feasible within the constraints of
  the degree program.
- Confirm that the candidate has the skills necessary to carry out the proposed work.
- Show there is likely to be sufficient original content in the proposed work to meet the
  requirements of the degree program.

The ultimate purpose of assessing research proposals is for all parties (i.e., the candidate, supervisor,
and discipline) to reassure themselves that the proposed research is worthwhile, meaningful, viable
and feasible, within the time and resource constraints of the program. It is also a requirement that
candidates wishing to upgrade from an MPhil to a PhD and PhD candidates wishing to continue,
prepare and successfully defend their research proposal according to this policy.

Process for Assessing and Approving Research Proposals

Stage One
Candidates have up to 18 months to successfully complete the thesis proposal defence requirements.
Candidates are strongly advised to schedule their defence within 10-14 months of commencement of
their candidature, such that if there are major issues, candidates have time to address these before
the 18 months is complete. Each discipline should remain consistent as to when they require their
candidates to complete their defence.

PhD and MPhil candidates wishing to upgrade to a PhD are required to:

1. In consultation with their supervisor, request the Postgraduate Research Coordinator (PGRC)
to select a Proposal Defence Committee (PDC). This committee will be chaired by the PGRC
and include a senior academic and a specialist with substantive knowledge of the area who
may be co-opted from outside the discipline. If the PGRC is the supervisor of the candidate,
they must find a suitable replacement.

2. Submit a written research proposal (word length is determined by individual disciplines) to
PDC members. Candidates must provide an electronic copy of their proposal to PDC
members at least two weeks and not more than four weeks before the date of their defence. If
requested by a committee member, candidates should also provide a hard copy to the
requesting committee member. The research proposal should cover:

   i. research problem
   ii. motivation for the research
   iii. conceptual model / framework
   iv. literature review
   v. specific research questions / propositions / hypotheses (as appropriate)
   vi. methodology (in detail)
   vii. outcome of pilot / exploratory work
   viii. plans for implementation of the proposal (schedule, costings, etc.).
3. Defend the proposal in a seminar to the PDC, discipline staff and other invited academics, as deemed appropriate by the supervisor(s) and PGRC. The seminar presentation will normally be of 20-30 minutes duration, followed by questions and answers from the audience. The candidate should focus the presentation to PDC members, who will have read the proposal. It is the responsibility of the candidate to schedule and organise the seminar at a time that is convenient to committee members.

Stage Two
Immediately following the seminar, the PDC will review and assess the proposal seminar defence and accompanying Research Proposal document in a closed-door session with the candidate. Questions and points of clarification may be directed at the candidate, who has the opportunity to respond. While the supervisor and associate supervisor are to attend as part of the committee, during the questioning of the candidate, they are to remain silent. They may not ask questions of the candidate and may not provide responses to questions on the candidate's behalf. Following the defence presentation, the PDC will convey to the candidate their overall decision (see the four possible outcomes below) as well as comments/feedback/criticism from the seminar (and accompanying defence document).

Action Arising from the Assessment of the Research Proposal
Following stage two, the committee will make a recommendation and inform the candidate of the outcome. A number of outcomes are possible:

a. **Proceed without changes.** The candidate is provided with PDC comments and allowed to proceed.

b. **Proceed subject to minor changes.** The candidate is provided with the comments and asked to provide a written response to PDC assessors. When the assessors acknowledge that they consider the response to be appropriate, the PDC will "sign-off" on the proposal. If the assessors do not agree on the outcome, a meeting with the Director of Doctoral Studies will take place. The objective of the meeting is to resolve the differences in the assessments. If no resolution is found, then the issue will be tabled at the next Business School Research Committee meeting.

c. **Revise and resubmit the proposal.** In this case, the candidate will defend a revised document. The candidate will provide a written reply detailing exactly how each point of the feedback has been addressed and supply a new document to the PDC. The document will be assessed by the same reviewers and (if required) listen to a revised presentation. The recommendation at this time must be (a), (b), or (d). If the assessors do not agree on the outcome, a meeting with the Director of Doctoral Studies and the assessors will take place. The objective of the meeting is to resolve the differences in the assessments. If no resolution is found, then the issue will be tabled at the next Business School Research Committee meeting.

d. **Rejection of the proposal** and the recommendation to the Business School that the candidate withdraw from the research program or complete an MPhil degree if it is deemed that the proposal forms the basis for an acceptable MPhil thesis. Candidates have the right to appeal decisions university policy.
Failure to Defend the Proposal

If a candidate fails to defend their proposal at all or fails to successfully defend their proposal within 18 months of enrolment, they will be required to:

1. Show cause as so why their candidature should not be terminated due to lack of progress. In these cases the candidate will already have one marginal or unsatisfactory Progress Review.

Or

2. Justify why their candidature should not be downgraded to the MPhil. In this case the candidate must have maintained satisfactory progress as assessed at the Progress Review and be deemed by the PDC to have sufficient material to complete the MPhil within the maximum duration of the degree that is two years taking into account candidates’ enrolment to date.

Or

3. Withdraw from the research program

Upgrade Candidates (MPhil to PhD)

Candidates wishing to upgrade from an MPhil to PhD, will go through the process detailed above with the same outcomes possible. To be eligible for an upgrade, they must achieve (a) or (b) outcome and in addition complete the required coursework with a distinction average and maintain satisfactory progress.

Awareness of the Assessment Procedures

This document outlining the assessment procedure is to be made available to all existing and incoming doctoral candidates. Supervisors should discuss assessment procedures with their candidates.

Candidate enquiries about the defence should be directed to the relevant Postgraduate Research Coordinator in the first instance
### Research Thesis Proposal Defence Outcome

- This form should be completed by the Postgraduate Coordinator/Chair of the Committee and forwarded to the Research Unit after the thesis proposal defence.
- A copy of the proposal and the committee’s comments should be forwarded with the completed form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>SID:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discipline:</td>
<td>Date of thesis defence:</td>
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**Committee Recommendation**

- **Written Thesis Proposal** *(copy attached)*
  - [ ] Proceed without changes
  - [ ] Proceed subject to minor changes – changes due by ..../..../....
  - [ ] Revise and Resubmit proposal – major alternations due by ..../..../....
  - [ ] Rejection of the proposal and recommend:
    - [ ] withdrawal from the research program; OR
    - [ ] downgrade to the MPhil

**Oral Presentation**

- [ ] Proficient  [ ] Deficient  [ ] Very Deficient

**Feedback to Candidate** *(copy attached)*

- [ ] Written  [ ] Oral

**Satisfactory APR**

- [ ] Yes  [ ] No

**Coursework results:**

- BUSS7901
- BUSS7902
- BUSS7903

**Upgrade from MPhil to PhD approval granted:**

- [ ] Yes  [ ] No  [ ] N/A

**Signatures**

- **Candidate:**
  - Date: ……/……/……
- **PGRC/Committee Chair:**
  - Date: ……/……/……
- **Director of Doctoral Studies:**
  - Date: ……/……/……