PhD and MPhil students are normally admitted to the University as provisional candidates. A decision about whether to confirm candidature is usually made after the student has completed 9 to 15 months of candidature (for PhD students) or 4-9 months (for MPhil students). In the School of Integrative Biology, we encourage students to complete the requirements for confirmation of candidature as early as possible in their candidature, between 6 and 12 months of candidature for PhD students. We recognize, however, that the best time for students to complete these requirements differs, depending on their backgrounds, the particular research projects they are undertaking and the timing of their field/lab work. It is not always essential that a student have collected a significant amount of data before their candidature confirmation. However, in some cases, a particular set of data is necessary, for example, to make decisions about the design of the rest of the project. In such cases, the student must have collected these data prior to their candidature confirmation, and must present these essential data in their talk and confirmation document. The requirements for confirmation of candidature are described below.

**Confirmation committee:** When a student is ready to go through the confirmation procedure a confirmation committee will be appointed for that student, comprising the student’s Principal Advisor (Supervisor), Associate Advisors and two “expert readers”. The expert readers may be academic staff members from SIB or another School within the University or scientists from government/industry who have relevant expertise. The general expectation is that one reader would be an academic staff member at UQ, while the other could be external. The expert readers should not be from the research group of one of the supervisors. One of the expert readers will be asked to be Chair of the Confirmation Committee and he or she report will back to the SIB Graduate Studies Committee, generally through the chair of the SIB Graduate Studies Committee. Where appropriate, a member of the SIB Graduate Studies Committee may also be part of the confirmation committee. For example, this would be appropriate in cases where the expert readers are quite junior compared to the Principal Advisor.

**Appointment of Expert Readers:** The Postgraduate Administrator will ask the Principal Advisor for suggestions as to who could be the expert readers and their contact details. The appointment of the expert readers will be confirmed, or otherwise, by the Chair of the Graduate Studies Committee and Head of School.

**Timing of the confirmation process:** When the student approaches the time for confirmation they and their Principal Advisor will be asked to decide on a date for the student’s oral presentation and interview. The student is responsible for arranging the timing and venue for their confirmation interview. It should be confirmed that this date is also suitable for the expert readers and if not an alternative date should be discussed with the Postgraduate Administrator. The written (hard copy plus electronic version) project proposal/literature review must then be handed into the School of Integrative Biology’s Postgraduate Administrator at least TWO WEEKS before the date of the talk and interview. This report will then be forwarded to the expert readers.

**Written document:** All PhD and MPhil students are required to prepare a written project proposal. This document should include the following:

1. Aims, Significance and Expected Outcomes – this section should present clearly the fundamental questions that are to be addressed, set in the
appropriate theoretical framework, and should include a critical synthesis of the relevant peer reviewed literature, to place the proposed project in the context of other work in the field.

(2) Research Plan and Methods – this section should show clearly how each aim will be addressed, in sufficient detail for the reader to be able to assess the likelihood that the research will be successful.

(3) Proposed Timetable.

(4) Project Budget – this section should detail the project budget and the sources from which the necessary funds will come

(5) Required skills – This section should detail the skills/expertise required for the completion of the research project, which of these the candidate already has, and how he/she will acquire the remaining necessary skills/expertise.

(6) Tentative List of Thesis Chapters/Papers for Publication.

This format is essentially the same as the format required for Australian Research Council grant proposals, minus some small sections not relevant here, and with the addition of the list of tentative thesis chapters. This document should be approximately 8,000 words, not including the list of references, but in many cases a somewhat longer document may be appropriate. MPhil proposals would be somewhat shorter.

**Oral presentation of project proposal:** All PhD and MPhil students are required to present a short talk (ca. 20 minutes) to the School about their proposed project. The talk should discuss the aims of the research project in the context of previous work by others in the research area, and describe the project plan and methods, showing clearly how the data to be collected will address the aims of the project. A timetable for the project should be presented. Any results already obtained can also be summarized, if time permits, but the presentation of the overview of the planned project is the most important part of the talk. If data already collected are essential for explaining the rest of the project plans, these data should be presented. This talk gives students experience at presenting formal talks and allows them to obtain constructive feedback on their project plans from members of the School other than their supervisors. It also informs other members of the School about the student’s work. These talks tend to take place on Monday lunchtimes during semester, but alternative times can be arranged if necessary.

**Interview:** The interview will involve the student and their Confirmation Committee (including the Expert Readers, Principal and Associate Advisors and a member of the Graduate Studies Committee, in some cases). Where possible the interview will be conducted directly after the seminar. Where an Associate Advisor cannot attend it is hoped that he/she will provide some written comments to the Chair of the Graduate Studies Committee on the candidate’s progress and some questions to be asked of the student after the talk. The reader who is the Chair of the Confirmation Committee will be given a list of issues (by the Postgraduate Administrator, prior to the meeting) that should be raised at the interview, including the following:

- the feasibility, scope, originality and duration of the project that is planned, with the discussion focused on the reports written by the members of the confirmation committee on the student’s written proposal
- the composition of the student’s advisory committee, with Associate Advisors being nominated if appropriate (at least one MUST be nominated at this interview if none have yet been assigned)
- whether the budget is realistic and sufficient funds are available for the project, and whether the student will be able to acquire the necessary skills
- any ethical, bio-safety or IP issues that are relevant
- authorship of proposed publications
The interview will be structured as follows:

1) The readers will first meet alone to discuss the proposal and decide on any issues that they feel should be raised during the interview.
2) The supervisors and readers will then meet together before the student is invited to join the group. At this point all issues to do with the project will be discussed.
3) The student will be asked to leave the room so that the readers and supervisors can reach a decision about candidature confirmation.
4) The supervisors will be asked to leave and the readers will talk alone with the student in case there are any issues to do with their project or supervision that the student would like to discuss in the absence of the supervisors.

Written feedback: The expert reader who is the Chair of the committee will provide written feedback on the following topics, using a form designed for this purpose:

1. Are the aims of the project clearly stated in the written proposal? Are these of appropriate scope and originality for the degree? Is each aim likely to form the basis of a thesis chapter? Is the number of aims is appropriate to the degree (MPhil or PhD)?
2. Are the thoroughness, depth and level of organization of the background literature review presented in the student’s written proposal adequate? Does it provide the necessary background to the aims?
3. Is the approach well planned? Are the experimental plan and methods presented in sufficient detail for the reader to assess their feasibility and suitability to address the aims of the project? Are there any potential problems with the plans?
4. Is the document well written? What specific aspects of writing or organization could have been improved?
5. Is the student likely to be able to complete the project in 2 years (for an MPhil) or 3½-4 years (for a PhD)? This question is of particular importance for international students – in this case it is also important to find out how many years of tuition support the student has.
6. Is the budget comprehensive and realistic? Do sufficient funds exist to cover the budget?
7. Is the composition of the student’s advisory team suitable?
8. Are there any ethical, permit, biosafety or IP issues that remain unresolved?
9. Have authorship issues been discussed?

This written report should first be sent to the other reader and the supervisors in case they wish to add anything; once finalized it will be given to the student and attached to the Candidature Confirmation form that is sent to the Graduate School.

Confirmation of candidature outcomes: At the end of the interview, the student will be told one of the following:

- that the student’s PhD/MPhil candidature will be confirmed
- that the student must modify their written proposal/literature review, as suggested at the interview, within two weeks – if the modifications are considered acceptable, the student will then be confirmed
- the student’s provisional candidature will be extended to a specific date (usually three months for a PhD), and the student will be informed in writing of
what he/she will have to do by that date to be again considered for
confirmation. A second extension of provisional candidature will be granted
only under exceptional circumstances.

The Chair of the Confirmation Committee (Expert Reader) will provide written
notification of its decision to the student, the Principal Advisor, and the Chair of the SIB
Graduate Studies Committee.

If a student still has not met the requirements for confirmation after a second extension of
provisional candidature, a recommendation will be sent to the Dean of Postgraduate
Students that the student’s candidature be terminated.

If a PhD student’s candidature has not been confirmed after 24 month of full-time
equivalent candidature, candidature will be terminated automatically.

**Deferral of the confirmation process:** If the student has set a date for their talk and
interview, and is then not ready to go through the confirmation procedure at that time, the
Confirmation Committee may recommend that the confirmation process be deferred for up
to three months, but only on the following grounds;

- the topic has changed
- necessary preliminary data collection has been unavoidably delayed
- other relevant circumstances have arisen

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