

School of Biological Sciences Mid-candidature Milestone Policy (August 2009)

Aim of the Mid-Candidature Review

In 2009 The University of Queensland changed the requirement for annual progress reports from research higher degree students to a program of milestones that should be met at various stages in the candidature of the student. These milestones reflect the stages and the consequent expectations that the student should have met in order to progress through their studies. The Mid-Candidature Review (<http://www.uq.edu.au/grad-school/mid-candidature-review>) falls just before the candidate is two thirds of the way through their PhD/MPhil; at this stage many candidates should be in a position to pull some data together in terms of publications or at least to have undertaken some major analyses of the data. In the School of Biological Sciences we have a wide array of project types; some entirely lab based, some entirely field based and some purely theoretical. For this reason we have implemented a rather broad milestone policy to accommodate these different areas of study.

The main aim of this milestone is to check that the project is going to plan, to encourage the candidate to start writing-up as they go and if things are not going to plan to take remedial action as soon as possible.

Objectives

As with all UQ postgraduate milestone reports, four objectives are to be met:

- An oral presentation
- A written piece of work showing evidence of progress in the candidature
- A meeting with the extended candidature review committee
- Written feedback to the candidate following the meeting

Timing

Mid-Candidature Review will occur half way between confirmation and the intended thesis submission date. An expected date for Mid Candidature Review will be set at the confirmation review. For most students the actually timing will be 24 months (full time) after the commencement of a PhD or 15 months (full time) after the commencement of an MPhil.

Mid-Candidature Review Committee

The expectation is that where possible this committee would comprise of the same people present on the Confirmation Committee (hereafter referred to as **candidature committee**). This would comprise of the student's Principal Advisor, Associate Advisors and at least one "Expert Reader".

The Principal Advisor would be responsible for asking the Expert Readers from the Confirmation Committee if they are still available for the Mid-Candidature Review. Where different Expert Readers need to be appointed then they would be selected as for the confirmation process.

The Expert Readers may be academic staff members from School of Biological Sciences 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 any of the advisors. One of the Expert Readers will be asked to be Chair of the Committee and he or she will report back to the School Graduate Studies Committee, generally through the chair of the School Graduate Studies Committee (Postgraduate Coordinator). Where appropriate, a member of the School Graduate Studies Committee may also be part of the committee. For example, this would be appropriate in cases where the Expert Readers are quite junior compared to the Principal Advisor.

If new Expert Readers are required, the Principal Advisor should provide suggestions and their contact details to the Postgraduate Administrator. The appointment of the Expert Readers will be confirmed, or otherwise, by the Postgraduate Coordinator or Head of School.

Scheduling of the Review

When a student approaches the time for mid-candidature review he/she and his/her 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 the presentation and meeting to discuss the milestone. It should be confirmed that this date is also suitable for the Expert Readers. When a date is confirmed the Postgraduate Administrator should be informed. If that date differs significantly (ie by 2 weeks or more) from that of the intended date of mid-candidature milestone please inform the Postgraduate Administrative Officer

Written document

For the Mid-Candidature Review, the written document component may take on different formats. The candidate should present a piece of work directly related to the main objectives of the PhD study. It may include one or more of the following in order of preference:

- A published scientific paper or review where the candidate is principal author
- A submitted scientific manuscript where the candidate is principal author
- A scientific report submitted to an external organization, where the candidate is principal author
- A completed chapter of the intended thesis or advanced draft of a manuscript where the candidate is principal author

The intention is that the candidate would have already achieved one the above and that it would not constitute additional effort or distract from the objectives of the PhD study. In the unlikely event that none of the above could be met then the student would be expected to prepare a draft of a thesis chapter including at least an introduction and materials and methods section.

In addition the candidate should provide

- a brief outline (abstract) of the thesis to date (no longer than one A4 page)
- an outline of thesis chapters*
- a list of proposed papers and status to date
- time-line for completion of thesis

*This may or may not be the same as discussed at candidature confirmation.

The candidate and the Principal Advisor should discuss which written document(s) is most appropriate. The preference would be the highest option possible from the above list. The candidate would be responsible for delivering a copy of the written documents to the Expert Readers and also ensuring that the **all** the advisors have the most recent drafts. This should be done at least 7 days before the proposed oral presentation and interview. A copy of this document should also be submitted electronically to the Postgraduate Administrator.

Oral Presentation

Again the intention is not to distract from the objectives of the PhD study and therefore the presentation may take on an informal approach. It would be quite appropriate for the presentation to be part of a lab or group meeting, with the criteria that the Expert Readers as well as the Principal Advisor and preferably the Associate Advisors are all present. The oral presentation could be either on one aspect of the PhD study to date or cover all the study to date and should be 15-20 minutes long. A rehearsal for an oral conference presentation or perhaps even the oral presentation at the actual conference would be appropriate, providing that most of the candidature committee were present.

Meeting

The meeting with the review committee should ideally occur following the oral presentation. As well as details of the project progress, a check list of questions should be discussed (see below). It should be emphasized that by this stage in the candidature the project should be well defined and data already gathered; although this may vary depending on the project type. If work has not yet been submitted for publication and/or a presentation at an external meeting or conference not yet undertaken, then the candidate should discuss the reasons why this has not yet been achieved. It may well be because of the nature of the research but if this is not the case then the candidate should be strongly encouraged to present their work as soon as possible.

As in the confirmation interview, the Expert Readers should take the opportunity to discuss progress with the Advisors and with the Candidate separately to ensure that appropriate interaction and feedback are occurring and any possible problems are discussed confidentially if necessary.

The review committee should also take the opportunity to discuss with the candidate what his/her future career plans might be and determine whether they might want to expand on experiences/skills appropriate for such an intended career. For instance they may need to extend their experience in: teaching; supervision (e.g, helping with honours/undergrad research students); media skills; knowledge about patenting and intellectual property; popular publications; oral presentation skills.

Written Feedback

A checklist guide of discussion points for the Mid Candidature Review Interview is provided below. Following the interview the Chair of the Candidature Committee in consultation with the other Expert Reader should give the student verbal feedback on their progress to date and follow this up with written feedback using the form below (sending a copy to the School Postgraduate Administrator and the Principal Advisor). Any concerns about this procedure can be discussed with the School Postgraduate Coordinator.

If the milestone has not been achieved the objectives that the candidate needs to meet before achieving the milestone should be listed in the form completed by the Expert Reader. This may include remedial action as listed below. A date by which time the objectives should be completed should be provided (usually of up to 3 months FTE). (See UQ policy on milestone recommendations <http://www.uq.edu.au/grad-school/milestone-recommendations>) and details sent to the Postgraduate Administrator. It is then up to the Candidate to liaise with the Chair of the Candidature Committee and to obtain the approval when appropriate. The Chair of the Candidature Committee should then inform the Postgraduate Administrator whether these objectives have been met or not.

Once the milestone has been met the *Attainment of Milestone* form <http://www.uq.edu.au/grad-school/downloads/rhd/milestone-attainment.doc>) **should be filled in by the Principal Advisor**, using feedback from the candidature committee where appropriate; the form is then sent to the Candidate for their approval and signature and then to the Postgraduate Coordinator and from there to the Graduate School

If after a 3 month extension the milestone is still not met then termination of candidature may be considered after consultation with the Postgraduate Coordinator and Head of School in consultation with the Dean of the Graduate School. Such an outcome is only likely to occur when the Candidate is failing to make efforts to progress their project (see below).

Remedial Action

Where the rate of progress or the quality of work being undertaken is a concern, the following steps may be considered to improve the chances of the Candidate being in a position to successfully submit a thesis.

- Change or extend the advisory team
- Focus on obtaining a publication in the immediate future
- Apply a slight change in direction; the candidate may consider applying for a Graduate School Travel Award if this is considered appropriate
- Ensure that correct technical expertise is sought including statistical, biotechnological, taxonomical
- Concerns re funding. Ideally this should not be an issue as this would have been discussed at confirmation. However if it is, it may be appropriate to discuss the situation with the Head of School. In some cases a slight change in direction may be necessary or collaboration with other labs
- Quantity of work to be undertaken- evaluate what is and is not necessary. If menial tasks have to be undertaken it may be cost effective to employ part-time help or volunteers, if lucky
- Seasonal issues can be a problem; if so the candidate should be encouraged to get on with the writing whilst waiting for the rain or for the sun to shine or the floods to recede. An interruption should be taken only as a last resort
- Lack of motivation. This is common at this stage of candidature. An interruption is a possibility but not necessarily recommended as it can sometimes exacerbate the issue and because of visa implications is not practical for international students. The candidate should set goals and start writing as soon as possible. If appropriate the candidate may want to contact Student Services for counseling or to take part in the range of workshops on offer <http://www.uq.edu.au/student-services/index.html?page=76450>

Recommendation for termination is the option of absolute last resort. The Dean of the UQ Graduate School usually **does not accept** recommendations that the candidate is liable for termination of candidature unless the candidate

- has attempted part or all of the school/institute's milestone process more than once;
- has been given clear written advice more than once that their progress and performance have been unsatisfactory,
- has been given clear, explicit and reasonable written advice more than once about how satisfactory progress and performance may be achieved and demonstrated; and has not reached the standard set out as necessary for achieving the milestone

Possible Discussion Points at the Mid-Candidature Review Interview

- What was the standard of the oral presentation?
- Did the candidate show development of expertise in their field of research?
- What proportion of the project data have been collected so far?
- Is the overall plan for the thesis structure appropriate?
- What is the quality of academic writing?
- Have papers been published?
- If papers have been published, are these papers in a journal appropriate for the career progression of the candidate?
- Is the planned timeline to submission of the thesis realistic?
- Is the composition of the advisory team and the roles of its members appropriate?
- Is appropriate technical expertise available for completion of the project?
- Has the work been presented externally eg conferences etc?
- Are appropriate material resources and funding available for completion of the project?
- Have skills and experiences appropriate to future career plans been acquired eg teaching, communication skills, conference attendance and presentation?
- Has the Milestone been achieved or is an extension / termination recommended?

If any points are a concern please discuss further with the candidate and include in the feedback email sent to the candidate following the meeting.



THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND

SCHOOL OF BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES
Faculty of Sciences

Research Higher Degree mid-term review report

Student's name:

Recommendation:

Conditions met

Extend

Reader:

Please read the Guidelines, before completing this form. The form is intended to provide the student with constructive feedback regarding their project. You are welcome to attach extra pages if necessary. For more information please contact Gail Walter

1. Did the candidate show development of expertise in their field of research?

Yes

No

Comment:

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.....

2. Is the overall plan for the thesis structure appropriate

Yes

No

Comment:

.....
.....

3. What proportion of the project data have been collected so far?

Comment:

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4. What was the standard of the (1) oral presentation and (2) writing (have papers been published)

Comment:

Oral.....

Writing.....

5. Have skills and experiences appropriate to future career plans been acquired eg teaching, communication skills, conference attendance and presentation?

Yes

No

Comment:

.....
.....

6. Is the planned timeline to submission of the thesis realistic?

Yes

No

Comment:

.....
.....

If the student has not achieved the milestone please include a list of objectives that need to be met

Comment:

1

2

3