

# School of Biological Sciences

## Thesis Review Milestone Policy (August 2009)

### Aim of the Thesis 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 Thesis Review (<http://www.uq.edu.au/grad-school/thesis-review>) falls approximately three months before submission of the PhD/MPhil thesis; at this stage all the data should be collated and analyzed and most chapters completed, having been reviewed by advisors.

The main aim of this milestone is to check that the thesis is on track for submission in about three months and is of the appropriate quality; the intention being to identify any major concerns that need attention before submission. It is also an opportunity for the names of potential assessors to be discussed.

### Objectives

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

- An oral presentation (completion seminar)
- A written piece of work showing evidence of progress in the candidature; for the Thesis Review this would actually constitute a large part of the thesis (see below)
- A meeting with the extended candidature review committee
- Written feedback to the candidate following the meeting

### Timing

Thesis Review should be approximately 3 months full-time equivalent (FTE) before the expected submission date of the thesis. Although a date for this may have been discussed at the Mid-Candidature Review, it is anticipated that in many cases this will change. Therefore the Postgraduate Administrator will contact the candidates prior to this point and confirm the timing for the Thesis Review which is consequently dependent on the updated anticipated thesis submission date. However, it is appreciated that even after the Thesis Review the actual thesis submission date may still change.

### Candidature Review Committee

The expectation is that where possible this committee would comprise of the same people present on the Confirmation Committee and Mid Candidature 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/ Mid-Candidature Committee if they are still available for the Thesis 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 Thesis Review he/she and her/his Principal Advisor will be asked to decide on a date for the student's PhD completion seminar and interview. The students should consult with the School Postgraduate Administrator regarding the timing of the seminar. Ideally the meeting with the Candidature Committee would be directly after the seminar; this may not always be

practical but it is hoped it would be within 2 weeks of the seminar. The student is responsible for arranging the meeting to discuss the milestone.

### **Written document**

For the Thesis Review, the written document component should include

- at least two **completed** thesis chapters or papers; the Expert Reader may choose only to review one
- a detailed list of contents including all written and proposed papers
- The final abstract. This abstract will be used when inviting assessors to review the thesis.
- a time-line for completion of thesis

Where multiple chapters or papers have been completed the candidate and the Principal Advisor should discuss which would be the most appropriate for the Expert Readers to review. The candidate would be responsible for delivering a copy of the written documents to the Expert Readers and also ensuring that **all** the advisors have the most recent versions. This should be done at least 7 days before the proposed interview. A copy of this document should also be submitted electronically to the Postgraduate Administrator.

### **Oral Presentation (Completion Seminar)**

The seminar should be 20-30 minutes long and aimed at a broad scientific audience. However, it should still include details of some of the results (ie data) from the PhD thesis. The candidate may want to focus on one aspect of the thesis or cover the whole range; it often works well for a student to present a quick overview of their whole thesis and then spend the rest of the seminar presenting one part of it in some detail.

### **Meeting**

The meeting with the review committee should ideally occur following the seminar. In many cases this may just be a formality if the thesis is well on track to being submitted. However it is still worthwhile having the meeting to ensure that there are no underlying problems. 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.

### **Written Feedback**

A checklist guide of discussion points for the Thesis 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 thesis 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, a list of objectives that need to be met by the candidate in order to achieve the milestone should be included on the form sent 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.

The Candidate should be aware that the Thesis Review Milestone should be attained prior to Thesis Submission. If the candidate or any members of the Candidature Committee (advisors or readers) have concerns about the process they should consult with the Postgraduate Coordinator and/or Head of School or with the Dean of the Graduate School.

## **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 submitting a publication in the immediate future
- Ensure that correct technical expertise is sought including statistical, biotechnological, taxonomical etc.
- 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
- If quality of writing is a concern, then student services may be able to help

## **Possible Discussion Points at the Thesis Review Interview**

- What was the standard of the oral presentation?
- Has the candidate shown expertise in their field of research?
- What proportion of the project data have been collected and analyzed?
- Is the overall plan for the thesis structure appropriate?
- What is the quality of academic writing?
- Have papers been published?
- Is the planned timeline to submission of the thesis realistic?
- Have the advisors received drafts of the thesis?
- Have the advisors provided feedback on drafts?
- Has the work been presented externally eg conferences etc?
- Is there technical expertise or equipment currently unavailable that is required to complete the thesis?
- Are there any significant time limiting factors that will delay submission eg lack of scholarship, job offer, full employment, departure from Australia?
- Is the quality of the thesis on track for the intended degree (PhD or MPhil)
- Names of potential assessors discuss; provide details to PG Administrator.
- Has the Milestone been achieved or is an extension 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

<b>Student's name:</b>		
<b>Recommendation:</b>	<b>Conditions met Extend</b>	<b>Reader:</b>

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?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<b>Comment:</b> ..... .....
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2. Is the overall plan for the thesis structure appropriate

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<b>Comment:</b> ..... .....
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3. What proportion of the project data have been collected so far?

<b>Comment:</b> .....
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4. What was the standard of the (1) oral presentation and (2) writing (have papers been published)

<b>Comment:</b> Oral..... Writing.....
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5. Have the advisors received drafts of the thesis and provided feedback?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<b>Comment:</b> ..... .....
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6. Are there any significant time limiting factors that will delay submission eg lack of scholarship, job offer, full employment, departure from Australia?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<b>Comment:</b> ..... .....
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7. Is the quality of the thesis on track for the intended degree (PhD or MPhil)?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<b>Comment:</b> ..... .....
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8. Names of potential assessors discussed, provide details.

<b>Comment:</b> 1 ..... 2 ..... 3 .....
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9. Please include a list of objectives that need to be met if the student has not achieved the milestone

<b>Comment:</b> 1 ..... 2 ..... 3 .....
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