Confirmation of Candidature: PhD

All probationary PhD candidates are required to present their work in progress to a review panel and submit a confirmation of candidature report at the end of their probationary period of 12 months. The purpose of the confirmation process is to:

1. Provide objective confirmation that the research direction is sound, the methodologies are appropriate, and that the standard of the student's comprehension and writing is in accordance with the requirements of a PhD. Note that **all** of these components will be assessed by the panel and will influence the final outcome
2. Allow candidates a platform on which to receive useful insights and feedback on their progress and research direction from a panel of experienced academics
3. Obtain independent advice on the possible refinement and development of the research question and methods
4. Provide a supportive environment to enhance presentation skills
5. Identify and remedy any difficulties that may impede successful completion of the research project

As part of the confirmation process candidates should demonstrate:

1. Satisfactory progress in the course work component of the candidature
2. Diligent and effective application to the research project
3. Satisfactory progress in the research project
4. Initiative consistent with the requirements a PhD

Confirmation Research Report:

A progress report should be submitted by the student at least one week prior to the presentation. This requires candidates to describe the progress of their work and to note any problems or obstacles encountered. A suggested format for the report (approximately 10-20 pages, as a guide) is as follows:

1. Title of the thesis
2. Background and motivation for the research question(s) being addressed in the thesis
3. An overview of the thesis, including some brief detail of the proposed content of all chapters. This should encompass a description of the theoretical and conceptual framework that underlies the thesis, and the procedures that are to be used in addressing the research questions
4. A timetable for completing the thesis and a statement of progress to date
5. A bibliography of references that appear in the report

Students are also encouraged to submit - as part of the confirmation review - a preliminary paper, typically linked to a specific chapter (or specific chapters) in the thesis. This paper does not have to be complete, but is to be written in the style of a paper that will eventually be submitted to an academic journal. *Students are not penalized if their research is not advanced enough at this stage to produce such a draft paper.*

Oral Presentation:

You are required to make a 20 minute oral presentation attended by members of the review panel. The presentation will be followed by 15 minutes for questions and feedback from the members of the audience. The oral presentation must explore at least one aspect of research undertaken to date and note anticipated future directions of the research program (e.g. planned thesis chapters).

The presentation should incorporate an introduction designed to set the scene (a beginning), a discussion and analysis of the problem (the middle) and a conclusion (the end). Your presentation slides will contain words, mathematical expressions, and graphical illustrations and diagrams, that together summarize a problem and/or a data set and address specific questions relating to that problem and/or data.

The presentation is short and must be accessible for staff and students not actively involved in your particular field of research, so special care must be taken to present ideas clearly and concisely. While constructing the presentation it is important to keep in mind that the most prominent feature should be the central idea underlying the proposed PhD project. The presentation must allow the audience to quickly see and appreciate the nature and structure of the problem, and how you intend to tackle it. The presentation title should be informative, so as to reduce the need for additional explanatory text. For example, the title can indicate the questions addressed and can even convey the major conclusion to be drawn.

The presentation must stand alone - without an in depth discussion of all the detailed particulars. Nevertheless, those explanations that are needed to make the problem, analysis and conclusions, clear and obvious should be included. Try to eliminate trivial and extraneous information. It is very helpful to present material (text, equations, graphs) one element at a time. In this way you guide your audience through your thought processes and the development of the research story that you are trying to tell. Providing (in one hit) a slide that is dense in material makes it difficult for your audience to know where to look and what to concentrate on, no matter what oral message accompanies the written slides.

There is a saying that a picture is worth a thousand words. However, remember that to be useful graphical displays must be very clear in what they are being used to convey! For example, all graphs should have their own

titles, labels and legends. Units should be correctly marked on axes and axes should be scaled appropriately. Each graphics legend should be positioned so that there is no question which graphic and which legend go together. If two graphs are to be compared, make the size and axis labels consistent. Use colours with restraint; colours should enhance recognition and understanding, not overwhelm the senses. Make sure that the connection between the text and mathematics in the slides and any graphics is very clear.

Finally, giving a good research presentation is an important skill to develop during your time as a graduate student. Consult early with your supervisor(s) to discuss your approach, and allow time for any presentation slides to be proof-read by them. Construct a presentation that does justice to your research efforts so far and helps the audience appreciate your contribution to the research field. Do not assume that your audience is already familiar with your research area in any detailed way or understands why the research problem you are addressing is important. The most advanced modelling techniques, the most complex theoretical derivations, the most intricate empirical conclusions or the most sophisticated graphics will be lost on an audience if they do not appreciate the nature of your research question and why it matters. As a condition of candidature you are required to have attended a substantial number of departmental (and other) research seminars. Observe other presenters carefully to learn which approaches work well and which don't, taking particular note of the techniques used by the most inspirational and informative speakers.