**THE MILESTONE PROCESS**

All UQ HDR students are required to complete candidature milestones, to assist with thesis progression, for the reasons outlined on the UQ Graduate School website (under managing your candidature).

<https://my.uq.edu.au/information-and-services/higher-degree-research/manage-my-candidature/milestones-and-extensions>

Although the Milestone process is UQ-wide, the practice may vary slightly between enrolling units, based on disciplinary drivers etc. Below are details of the IMB Milestone practice, to help support you through your HDR program.

CANDIDATURE COMMITTEE:

Candidature Committee members attend and participate in your milestones and are otherwise invited to offer advice and input into your research. They provide an independent evaluation (at Milestones) of the:  
• ability of the candidate.  
• effectiveness of the advisory team.  
• feasibility of the research project.  
  
Candidature committee members can also provide;  
• access to additional research capabilities and expertise

• Mentorship of candidates on HDR related matters between milestones.  
• links into industry, to assess and protect the commercial value of the candidates research output.  
• input to societies, agencies, networks or consortia, that can make use of the candidates research output.

At IMB, the Candidature Committee is purpose built for each candidate and the choice of candidature committee members is entirely a decision between you and your advisory team. It is composed of the advisory team and at least two other members (quorum), at least one of whom needs to be from IMB, so they can serve as Chair (and log into Pebbles to generate the Milestone assessment). During the first year of candidature, all IMB HDR candidates must determine their candidature committee membership.

All IMB Group Leaders and postdoctoral fellows (as well as comparably qualified researchers across and even external to UQ) are authorized to take on the role of Candidature Committee member to IMB HDR candidates. There is no limit on the number of members of the Candidature Committee, other than the practical limitations of contact and organising meetings.

Once the committee has been agreed between Advisors and Candidate, the Principal Advisor will contact and confirm that nominated non-advisory members of the Candidature Committee are willing and able to accept such a role, and will then notify the Candidate and HLO.

The Chair of the Candidature Committee is a non-advisory IMB member of the Candidature Committee, who will chair Milestone Interviews, and draft Milestone Assessments. Where the Candidature Committee has more than one non-advisory IMB researcher (Group Leader or otherwise), the committee may elect the Chair from these individuals.

Each IMB Division Head has *ex officio* membership of the Candidature Committees for all HDR Candidates where the Principal Advisor is a member of their Division, and may attend and participate in Milestone Interviews at their discretion. The IMB Postgraduate Coordinator is also an *ex officio* member of all IMB HDR Candidature Committees.

As projects progress and evolve it is quite common to have the membership of the candidature committee also adapt and evolve accordingly. Whether incoming or outgoing, be sure to value and respect the contributions made by your candidature committee members. Please note, if you are adding or deleting a person as a candidature committee member, it is appropriate to first confirm that they support this action.

*To help keep a readily accessible record in Pebbles of current candidature committee members, please enter/register all changes. Pebbles uses this information to manage Milestones and other aspects of candidature, so please make every effort to keep this information up-to-date.*

TIMING OF THE MILESTONE:

The timing of Milestones is set, based on duration of candidature, and is mandated by the UQ Graduate School (GS), as a program requirement.

<https://my.uq.edu.au/information-and-services/higher-degree-research/manage-my-candidature/milestones-and-extensions>

If you are unable to undertake your milestone by the due date, then you can request an Extension of Milestone via myUQ (or by using the GS link above). Please note, however, that the number of extensions available is limited.

If you are undertaking an oral thesis examination (compulsory for anyone who commenced in 2018 or later), then, as a PhD student, you have a maximum of 2 extensions (3 months each) and are expected to lodge your thesis for examination by 3.75 years of candidature. MPhil students have a total of 4.5 months of extension (max 3 months at any one milestone).

The relative due dates of the components for each milestone is often dictated by the oral presentation. At IMB, the interview, ideally, is scheduled for the same day as the Oral Presentation and the Written Report is due a set period prior to interview (one week for Milestone 1 and 2 and two weeks for Milestone 3).

SCHEDULING A MILESTONE

IMB HDR Candidates are responsible for the coordination of Milestone interviews (although they can seek assistance from the HLO, if running into difficulties).

Candidates must negotiate milestone dates and times with advisory teams and candidature committees, to ensure that they can achieve a quorum (full advisory team plus at least two candidature committee members, one of whom is based at IMB).

This is often achieved via Doodle Poll

Candidates must also book venues for the oral presentation and interview (via QBP reception), and prepare their Milestone Report (as a PDF).   
  
Once all of the above is in hand, the candidate should navigate to their Pebbles Candidate Profile page, and check that Pebbles is displaying (left hand column) the correct advisory team and candidature committee. If not please select either "Advisory Team" or "Candidature Committee" buttons, to make changes. Once the advisory team and candidature committee are up-to-date, select the relevant "Milestone" button, to open a window where the candidate can enter the date, time and booked venue for the milestone oral presentation and interview, and where they can upload a PDF of their milestone report. Once all of the above is in place, the candidate can select the button "Invite Advisory Team & Candidature Committee", to activate an email invitation, with date, time and venue information, and with the Milestone Report attached.  
  
Note 1 - Please be sure to check the availability of all participants BEFORE submitting an invitation via Pebbles.  
  
Note 2 - In the event that you do not attain at the first attempt, but have an extension, please use the date. time, venue and Extension report fields to manage the extension interview.  
  
Note 3 - When negotiating milestone dates, times and venues please be aware of your obligations to attain milestones 1-3 by the set dates (12, 24 and 36 months respectively). Please allow sufficient time to accommodate the busy schedules of others.

MILESTONE 1: Confirmation of Candidature:

HDR Candidates(PhD and MPhil) are enrolled provisionally and will (or will not) have their candidature confirmed at Milestone 1. For PhD Candidates, this occurs at 12 months post commencement and for MPhil students at 6 months post commencement. This is the time when the Candidature Committee assesses the Candidate’s ability to attain Milestone 1.

Milestone 1 assesses the:

Project

Resources

Candidate

Progress

Is it of suitable scope for an HDR degree?

Is suitable funding, infrastructure and supervision in place?

Does the Candidateshow evidence of appropriate research skills/potential? Has a suitable quantity of quality research been completed?

The Candidature Committee makes its assessment based on a Written Report, Oral Presentation and an Interview, delivered by or conducted with the candidate.

CONFIRMATION REPORT:

The preferred page length of the written report should be determined after consultation with the Advisory Team, but as a guide it is usually between 30-50 pages for the PhD, and 20-30 pages for the MPhil, depending on discipline. The report should contain the following sections:

*Literature Review*

Providing sufficient background information on the field (both summary and analysis) to appreciate why the Candidate’s research questions are novel and significant, identifying the gap in the literature that you are trying to address and highlighting why it is important.

*Aims and Significance*

Providing a clear statement indicating the overarching hypothesis, driving the work (if there is one), research aims and research questions to address those aims.

*Summary of Work To Date*

Presenting outcomes in the format of a “Results” section of a paper, including a brief description of techniques/ methods being used with some commentary on the relative success or difficulties experienced. As with a manuscript, figures should be accompanied by detailed stand-alone figure legends that provide information on statistical analyses (plus n= x), abbreviations etc. A discussion of the significance of the findings can be included after each section.

*A Research Plan and Timeline*

Providing a clear picture of the intended schedule until time of thesis completion – noting key experimental objectives, analysis approaches, writing up, travel and presentations, etc.

*Skills And Resources*

Detailing which skills and resources the Candidatehas already obtained and may yet need to acquire, noting which resources are available and which (if any) are not.

*Current and Planned Publications*

Including research articles/reviews and conference presentations/posters (both completed and in draft form).

The Confirmation report should be written in a scientific style, presenting information and concepts in a logical and cohesive manner. It is anticipated that it may take you up to 3 weeks to complete a full draft. Typically, the advisory team will review and provide constructive feedback on one substantive draft. The completed Confirmation report must be circulated to the Candidature Committee at least 1 week prior to the scheduled Confirmation Oral Presentation.

*The Candidate must upload a copy of this report to Pebbles Jr.*

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CONFIRMATION ORAL PRESENTATION:

The IMB has 3 divisions, each with a weekly Divisional Forum

Cell Biology and Molecular Medicine (CBMM)

Genomics of Development and Disease (GoDD)

Chemistry and Structural Biology (CSB)

For both CBMM and GoDD, students are scheduled to present the oral components for each of their milestones within the Divisional Forum and so dates for Milestone presentations are set at the start of each year.

For CSB, students organise their oral presentation via an extended lab meetings etc. They often use Doodle Poll to determine a mutually agreed date for the milestone oral presentation and interview.

HDR presentations (PhD and MPhil) should be of 30 minutes duration and must include 5-10 mins for questions from the audience. It is expected that thecandidatewill deliver a well-rehearsed, high-quality oral presentation, supported by slides (e.g., PowerPoint), that provides a clear, concise and logical argument for the overall research project, the work achieved to date, and the research planned. Ideally, you

should demonstrate knowledge and confidence in the proposed research project, the related literature and associated technologies, and be responsive and articulate when dealing with questions.

The Candidature Committee will be in attendance and will assess the presentation.

INTERVIEW:

Each candidatemust undertake a confirmation interview with their Candidature Committee of ~ 1 hour duration, which is scheduled to occur, as soon as practically possible, after the delivery of the oral presentation (usually the same day). At interview, thecandidate fields questions arising from the oral and written presentations, technical questions, questions regarding publication strategies and any other questions relevant to the project. There is a point in the interview when the candidate leaves the room and the Advisory Team discusses, with the rest of the committee, their perceptions of the candidate’s performance. The candidate returns and the Advisory Team leaves so that the candidate can discuss issues associated with supervision and resources. In both situations, the default is that these discussions are confidential unless something is raised that needs to be openly discussed to move candidature forward.

At the conclusion of the interview, the committee reconvenes with the candidate and the Chair of the Candidature Committee gives a brief verbal summary of the committee’s recommendations.

ASSESSMENT:

The Chair of the Candidature Committee must draft a Confirmation Assessment document, using the online student database, Pebbles. The report provides constructive comments about the written and oral presentations, the Candidate, Advisory Team, project and future directions.

If there is a recommendation for Extension of Milestone, there is also a clear statement regarding why the Committee decided that this was necessary and also clear instructions as to what must be achieved by the Candidate by the next interview in order for the milestone to be attained.

Once the Chair has signed-off the report (using LDAP to authenticate sign-off) an email is sent to the Principal Advisor to request their authorization via Pebbles (cced to HLO).

Once this is complete, a pdf of the report is generated and stored in Pebbles, which can be accessed directly by the student. Alternatively, the HLO will download the report and send this via CRM to the candidate, with instructions to the student about completing the milestone documentation via myUQ (see email template: Appendix A). The IMB requests that the Candidate uploads the Milestone Assessment with the Milestone request via myUQ so that the PGC knows the process is complete (before he endorses).

**MILESTONE 2: Mid-candidature**

Although it will vary for each project, by Mid-Candidature it is expected that the PhDCandidatehas at least a draft for a research publication, and sufficient data for 1-2 research chapters, within the thesis. For MPhil Candidates, it is expected that they have sufficient data for at least 1 research chapter by this Milestone. Please note that if an MPhil candidate wishes to upgrade to the PhD program, this must be determined and requested prior to Milestone 2 as per policy:

All Candidates should have a clear thesis plan which should provide a focus for the remainder of the degree.

Milestone 2 assesses the:

Project

Resources

Candidate

Progress

Is it proceeding on plan, and still of suitable scope for an RHD degree? Are funding, infrastructure and supervision still in place and adequate? Do they show evidence of skills/knowledge, and ownership of project?

Are they advancing and on track for the completion of a high-quality project?

The Candidature Committee makes its assessment based on a Written Report, Oral Presentation and an Interview, delivered by or conducted with the candidate.

MID-CANDIDATURE REPORT:

The written report should be smaller than that for the confirmation report, as no literature review is required. The length can be determined after consultation with your PA. It should provide a:

*Summary of the objectives of the project*

This should be brief (two paragraphs max) and be followed by a restatement of Aims

*Summary of Work to Date*

Results obtained since the last Milestone, indicating significance relative to project aims, presented in the format of a “Results” section of a paper, inclusive of relevant publication-quality figures and tables. If a draft, submitted or accepted manuscript is available and captures the work achieved, it can be used for this section or included as an appendix.

*Research Plan, Thesis Outline & Timelines*

A detailed research plan for the remainder of candidature, prepared in consultation with the Advisory team, which is sufficiently detailed, and with a timeline, to provide a schedule of activity and outcomes to submission – noting key experimental, data analysis and written objectives. A thesis outline detailing the proposed and available content for each chapter, and the work remaining to realistically complete the research underpinning each chapter, would also be useful.

*Skills And Resources*

An account of what skills and resources the Candidate has already obtained and may yet need to acquire, noting which resources are available and which (if any) are not. This analysis should include a realistic assessment of any constraints or limitations imposed by restricted access to suitable skills (training) and/or resources.

*Current and Planned Publications*

Including research articles/reviews and conference presentations/posters (both completed and in draft form).

The report should be written in a scientific style that presents information and concepts in a logical and cohesive manner. Unlike the Confirmation Report, the first full draft of this report should be completed, by the candidate, within several days because it is expected that, at this stage, the Candidatewill have well-established research objectives, is collecting and processing data in a suitable format to produce high-quality figures and tabulated data (as they go), and has developed a clear thesis plan, which should be driving data collection. Typically, the Advisory Team will review and provide constructive feedback on one substantive draft.

The completed report must be circulated to the Candidature Committee at least 1 week prior to the scheduled interview.

*The Candidate must upload a copy of this report to Pebbles Jr.*

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MID-CANDIDATURE PRESENTATION:

PhD Candidates must deliver 2 oral presentations, as part of Milestone 2. MPhil Candidates are only required to complete the Mid-Candidature Oral Presentation. The formats for these presentations are given below:

1. Three Minute Thesis Presentation (PhD Candidates only)

All candidates are expected to give a 3MT presentation, in conjunction with the annual competition between 1.5 and 3 years of candidature, as part of a Milestone 2 requirement. The details of the presentation can be found on the GS website and presenters will be alerted at least 1 month prior to the competition that they are due to present. Finalists will present their talk as part of the IMB HDR Student Symposium and those with the top scores will be invited to represent IMB at the All-Institute final.

https://threeminutethesis.uq.edu.au/

1. Mid-Candidature Oral Presentation

Following discussion and pre-agreement with theCandidature Committee, the Mid-Candidature Oral Presentation can take one of the following formats:

1. a scientific conference oral presentation,
2. an IMB Divisional Forum Presentation
3. an extended Research Group Meeting presentation ,
4. such other oral presentation formats as agreed by the Candidature Committee.

The Mid-Candidature Oral Presentation must be of at least 15 mins duration, and be accompanied by 5-10 mins question time. Delivery should be strong and professional, and content should provide a clear, concise and logical argument for the work undertaken. If the Candidature Committeeis not present (e.g. conference), assessment can take the form of a written report from an attending nominated Assessor acceptable to, and agreed in advance by, the Candidature Committee. The Mid-Candidature Oral Presentation must be delivered no earlier than 6 months prior to the Mid-Candidature Interview.

INTERVIEW:

Each candidatemust undertake a Mid-Candidature interview with their Candidature Committee of 30min- 1 hour duration, which is scheduled to occur as soon as practically possible after the oral presentation. It can be uncoupled from the oral presentation, if necessary, if the oral presentation is given as part of a conference. If this is the case, the candidate usually provides a brief oral summary of findings (15 minutes) to the committee, at the start of the interview.

At interview, thecandidate fields questions arising from the oral and written presentations, technical questions, publication strategies and any other questions relevant to the project. There is a point in the interview when the candidate leaves the room and the Advisory Team discusses, with the rest of the committee, their perceptions of the candidate’s performance. The candidate returns and the Advisory Team leaves so that the candidate can discuss issues associated with supervision and resources. In both situations, the default is that these discussions are confidential unless something is raised that needs to be openly discussed to move the candidature forward.

At the conclusion of the interview, the committee reconvenes with the candidate and the Chair of the Candidature Committee gives a brief verbal summary of the committee’s recommendations.

ASSESSMENT:

The Chair of the Candidature Committee must draft a Mid-Candidature Assessment document, using the online student database, Pebbles. The report provides constructive comments about the written and oral presentations, the Candidate, Advisory Team, project, and future directions.

If there is a recommendation for Extension of Milestone, there is also a clear statement regarding why the Committee decided that this was necessary and also clear instructions as to what must be achieved by the Candidate by the next interview in order for the milestone to be attained.

Once the Chair has signed-off the report (using LDAP to authenticate sign-off) an email is sent to the Principal Advisor to request their authorization via Pebbles (cced to HLO).

Once this is complete, a pdf of the report is generated and stored in Pebbles, which can be accessed directly by the student. Alternatively, the HLO will download the report and send this, via CRM, to the candidate, with instructions to the student about completing the milestone documentation via myUQ (see email template: Appendix A). The IMB requests that the Candidate uploads the Milestone Assessment with the Milestone request via myUQ so that the PGC knows the process is complete (before he endorses).

**MILESTONE 3: Thesis Review**

This Milestone is designed to fall in the last year of candidature and at least 3 months prior to Thesis submission.

Milestone 3 is an opportunity to focus (or re-focus) attention on the end-game - the submission of a thesis - and on the Candidate’s preparedness to undertake the planning and writing of a thesis. Consideration is also given to the possible need for additional training in: scientific writing, the use of bibliographic software, and the mechanics of desktop publishing. This is also a suitable time to review/recommend suitable Thesis Examiners and to decide whether the thesis should be treated as commercial-in-confidence. The career projection of the candidate can also be discussed in the context of support pre- and post-submission to achieve desired goals.

Milestone 3 assesses the:

Candidate

Progress

Thesis

Submission

Examiners

Confidential

Are they committed to and capable of a timely submission and completion? Is the scope, quantity and quality of completed original research satisfactory? Are the content and plan clear?

Has a realistic and timely date been agreed, and is it justified? Has consideration been given to the choice of Thesis Examiners?

Is the research commercial-in-confidence? Will the thesis need to be embargoed

The Candidature Committee makes its assessment based on a Written Report, Oral Presentation and an Interview, delivered by or conducted with the candidate.

THESIS REVIEW REPORT:

This is a written report of no set length that should cover:

*Thesis Title, Abstract & Plan*

An accurate, concise and informative abstract should be prepared, capable of clearly articulating the aims and outcomes of the research presented in the thesis, as a cohesive narrative. A Table of Contents should also be provided, that provides a dot-point outline of thesis chapters, including subheadings etc., indicating scope and content of both the introduction and research chapters.

*Thesis Chapter Draft(s):*

A refined draft of at least one thesis chapter. This may take the form of a submitted/accepted peer- reviewed scientific publication in which the Candidate is a senior author.

*Timetable of Submission:*

Provide a table which indicates, against each chapter, the level of completion of that chapter (in %), the nature of the experimental work remaining and the date by which it is expected to be completed. At the bottom of the table there should also be a proposed date by which the thesis will be ready to be lodged for examination.

*Examiners:*

Comment from the Candidate, indicating their views on the mix of disciplinary knowledge required among the Thesis Examiners, noting any reservations or concerns about possible individual Examiners, indicating reasons for exclusion such as conflict of interest, etc. This would also be a good time to clearly identify the Chair of Examiners and approach them to discuss timeframes.

*Current and Planned Publications*

List of research articles/reviews and conference presentations/posters (completed or in draft form).

An advanced draft of the Thesis review Report should be sighted, reviewed and discussed with the Advisory team prior to distribution to the Candidature Committee. Typically, the Advisory Team will review and provide constructive feedback on one substantive draft. The completed report must be circulated to the Candidature Committee at least 2 weeks prior to the scheduled interview.

*The Candidate must upload a copy of this report to Pebbles Jr.*

THESIS REVIEW ORAL PRESENTATION

Following discussion and pre-agreement with theCandidature Committee, the Thesis Review Oral Presentation can take one of the following formats:

1. a scientific conference oral presentation,
2. an IMB Divisional Forum Presentation
3. an extended Research Group Meeting presentation ,
4. such other oral presentation formats as agreed by the Candidature Committee.

The Thesis Review Oral Presentation must be of at least 15 mins duration, and be accompanied by 5-10 mins question time. Delivery should be strong and professional, and content should provide a clear, concise and logical argument for the work undertaken. If the Candidature Committeeis not present (e.g. conference), assessment can take the form of a written report from an attending nominated Assessor acceptable to, and agreed in advance by, Candidature Committee. For PhD students, the Thesis Review Oral Presentation must be delivered no earlier than 6 months prior to the Thesis Review Interview. For MPhil Students, it must not be more than 3 month prior to interview.

INTERVIEW:

Each candidatemust undertake a Thesis Review interview with their Candidature Committee of 30min-1 hour duration, which is scheduled to occur as soon as practically possible after the oral presentation.

At interview, the discussion focuses around what remains to be completed in order to achieve a complete thesis. It is also a time to review the candidate’s professional growth throughout the degree. At this stage, they should be an expert in their project area and be able to discuss their outcomes in the context of the literature. There is a point in the interview when the candidate and advisory team can sequentially leave the room but this may not be necessary and is left to the discretion of both parties. At the conclusion of the interview, the Chair of the Candidature Committee gives a brief verbal summary of the committee’s recommendations.

ASSESSMENT:

The Chair of the Candidature Committee must draft a Thesis Review Assessment document, using the online student database, Pebbles. The report provides constructive comments about the written and oral presentations, the Candidate, Advisory Team, project, and feasibility of thesis completion in a set timeframe.

If there is a recommendation for Extension of Milestone, there is also a clear statement regarding why the Committee decided that this was necessary and also clear instructions as to what must be achieved by the Candidate by the next interview in order for the milestone to be attained.

Once the Chair has signed-off the report (using LDAP to authenticate sign-off) an email is sent to the Principal Advisor to request their authorization via Pebbles (cced to HLO).

Once this is complete, a pdf of the report is generated and stored in Pebbles, which can be accessed directly by the student. Alternatively, the HLO will download the report and send this, via CRM, to the candidate, with instructions to the student about completing the milestone documentation via myUQ (see email template: Appendix A). The IMB requests that the Candidate uploads the Milestone Assessment with the Milestone request via myUQ so that the PGC knows the process is complete (before he endorses).

**MILESTONE 4: Thesis lodgment**

COMPLETION SEMINAR:

IMB Candidates nearing (or post) thesis submission/completion must present a seminar, either in the Divisional Forum or to a similar expert open audience, detailing the scope and outcomes of their HDR research. Currently, this can occur within 6 months (either side) of thesis lodgment. Although this is not assessed, as we prepare for Oral Examinations, it may be used to provide constructive feedback, in a timeframe that would pre-date the examination