

Sociology, Criminology and Gender Studies

Doctoral Confirmation Review Process & Proposal Guidelines

June 2023

The PhD Confirmation Review is an opportunity to clarify your doctoral research proposal, to demonstrate your knowledge of the field of research you are working in, to identify potential challenges in undertaking research and to review your supervision arrangements.

Confirmation is a critical process that is required to confirm your doctoral candidature. It must take place at the end of your first year of doctoral enrolment (Full-Time Enrolment).

The process involves completing your mandatory milestones, presenting your work to a review committee, and offering a public-facing seminar about your research. You will also have a discussion with your supervisory team around your progress, achievement, development, future plans, milestones and confirmation review form.

Details of the University of Auckland policy and procedures on Doctoral Confirmation of Candidature are available online:

<https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/about-us/about-the-university/policy-hub/research-innovation/doctoral-study/application-candidature-registration/doctoral-confirmation-candidature-policy-procedures.html>

1. Confirmation Requirements:

- Approval of a full thesis proposal by the Confirmation Review Committee
- A substantial piece of piece of written work, completed to the satisfaction of the supervisors and the Confirmation Review Committee.
- Discussion with the Confirmation Review Committee of the full thesis proposal, written work, research plan and other thesis-related work, to the satisfaction of the Committee.
- An oral presentation on your doctoral work to the satisfaction of the Confirmation Review Committee, to be completed in as a public seminar immediately before the closed-door confirmation review meeting with the committee and supervisors.
- Ethics approval and/or permissions, if required for the initial period of candidature.
- All other mandatory and additional confirmation milestones as detailed in Wahapū

2. Confirmation Review Committee

The Confirmation Review Committee will include two academic staff with appropriate knowledge or expertise in the broad field of the candidate's research, normally staff of the Sociology and Criminology programme, though staff from other disciplines may serve on the committee if they bring relevant subject expertise. The PhD advisor, in consultation with the supervisors, will recommend reviewers for the confirmation review. The PhD Advisor (or their designee) will chair the Confirmation Review Committee.

3. Timing:

- All requirements for the Confirmation Review must be fully completed and signed off by the School of Graduate Studies before the end of 13 months of full-time equivalent enrolment.
- No more than 2 months and no less than 2 weeks before the 12 month FTE anniversary of enrolment:
 - o The PhD candidate must submit to their supervisors the candidate confirmation review report, and their full thesis proposal and substantial piece of written work.

- The PhD Candidate must also initiate the confirmation review process in [Wahapū](#) when they submit their confirmation review report.
- The PhD Advisor (or their designee) will arrange a time and location for the Oral Presentation and Confirmation Review Meeting.
- The PhD candidate must provide the completed review report, full thesis proposal and substantial piece of written work to the PhD advisor (or their designee) at least two weeks, and ideally four weeks, prior to the Confirmation Review Meeting. The PhD Advisor will circulate these documents to other members of the review committee.
- The Oral Presentation and Confirmation Review Meeting are to be held consecutively on the same day.

4. Oral Presentation

A key part of the confirmation review process is the oral presentation of your research proposal. This is an opportunity to outline your research topic, the research objectives and questions you are focusing on, the contribution your research will make to the field, and to provide detail on the key elements of your research design.

- The oral presentation will take one hour, including a presentation of 20-30 minutes followed by questions, answers and discussion.
- The oral presentation is generally open to staff and students in the School of Social Sciences and anyone the candidate wishes to invite.
- The PhD Advisor (or their designee) will chair the presentation, which includes managing the question-and-answer period.

5. Confirmation Review Meeting

Following the completion of the oral presentation, the PhD candidate, supervisors and confirmation review committee will meet privately to discuss PhD progress and agree on the outcome of the confirmation review.

- The confirmation review meeting will take approximately 30 - 45 minutes.
- The Chair will open by going over the purpose and process of the meeting,, and will manage the discussion, including keeping time and assuring all required processes are observed. The Chair should also take notes on substantive issues of discussion that can later be used in writing up the committee's report.
- The review committee will take the academic lead in the meeting, asking questions, making suggestions and giving the student constructive feedback on their proposal and plans. The panel also make the recommendation on the outcome of the review, via the process and with the options set out below.
- The PhD student will be given the opportunity to speak confidentially (without supervisors present) about their progress and any issues they wish to raise in private.
- The supervisors will be given the opportunity to speak confidentially (without the PhD student present) about the PhD progress and any issues they wish to raise in private.
- Following these discussions, the review committee will recommend that the candidate's candidature be:
 - Confirmed, or
 - Confirmed with milestones, or
 - Extended on a provisional basis for a period up to 6 months FTE (total duration of provisional candidature must not exceed 19 months FTE), or
 - Terminated and the candidate enrolled in another programme, or
 - Terminated
- The candidate will be asked to return to the room and they will be told the recommendation made by the review panel, given feedback on their project/progress and, if necessary, offered guidelines about any improvements in progress that need to be made before appearing before

another review panel. The candidate will be given an opportunity to respond or seek clarification.

- Within 1 week of meeting with the candidate, the Chair of the Confirmation Review Committee must complete the confirmation review committee report and make a recommendation on the candidature.

6. Preparation for the Oral Presentation and Confirmation Review Meeting

Students should develop these documents and prepare their oral presentation in consultation with their supervisors. The PhD candidate must provide the completed review report, full thesis proposal and substantial piece of written work to the PhD advisor (or their designee) at least two weeks, and ideally four weeks, prior to the Confirmation Review Meeting. The PhD Advisor will circulate these documents to other members of the review committee.

- **The full thesis proposal** (5000-8000 words, excluding references)
 - This should be a considerably expanded/revised version of the proposal submitted through the Expression of Interest process prior to enrolment and should provide a substantive argument for the proposed project;
 - The full thesis proposal should include a title and substantively address the following: problem/question/hypothesis; importance of research topic; review of significant prior research; details of methods and methodology; ethical considerations; plans for analysis of data; research limitations; proposed structure of the thesis; timeline to completion and budget if required. PhD candidates should seek advice from their supervisors about the information required under each of these headings;
- **A substantial piece of written work** (5000-8000 words, excluding references)
 - This will usually be the literature review or theory chapter, but may be an introductory chapter or a draft paper for publication, as long as the topic is clearly contributing to the doctoral project – decisions about which piece to include will be made between the candidate and supervisors.
 - The substantial piece of written work should be a polished piece of work that is presented in a coherent structure and formatted and referenced appropriately.
- **A formal, academic presentation on their research proposal (20-30 minutes) focusing on**
 - the most central and interesting aspects of the research question/problem;
 - the theoretical and/or empirical literature that has informed the candidate's project to date;
 - how the candidate plans to move forward intellectually;
 - other details if/as necessary. Candidates should consult with their supervisors about how best to structure their specific presentation.
- **Evidence that Ethics Committee approval has been gained if applicable** (for example, by providing a copy of the latest communication with the Ethics Committee).
- **The Confirmation Review Report**, which includes details of the achievement of provisional goals and future goals.

Guidelines for PhD full thesis proposal

In brief

- A full PhD thesis proposal is normally submitted to supervisors in the first 9-10 months of candidature. The proposal is then refined in consultation with the supervisors leading up to the Confirmation Review Meeting in the 12th or 13th month of the PhD candidature.
- Approval of the proposal by the Confirmation Review Committee is required for confirmation of PhD candidature within the first 13 months of full-time study.

The requirements

The purpose of the proposal is to focus your research on a specific topic and to identify your research objective and questions. Having completed the proposal, you should have a strong sense of the scope of the research and be able to communicate what your PhD research will contribute to the field of study. To demonstrate the scope and contribution of the research, your proposal should include a clear and coherent overview of relevant scholarly literature and a detailed account of the proposed methodology. A plan for carrying out research, undertaking analysis and writing the thesis should be included in the proposal to demonstrate that the proposal is viable within the timeframe of a PhD.

Writing the proposal

The transition from an idea for a thesis to a well-defined proposal is frequently the most difficult task of the research project but also potentially the most rewarding. This is the time when you are exploring your field of interest, reading scholarship, narrowing your topic, and formulating questions. Often, the first proposal submitted to supervisors is not the final one as a process of refining usually occurs through reviews and critical comments that can be incorporated into revised drafts. The proposal also provides the Confirmation Review Committee with the information they need to approve and/or suggest modifications to the research project.

A full research proposal should be 5000-8000 words long. Any PhD research topic will be specialised and relate to one or more specific areas of the subject-matter, literature and methodologies of sociology, criminology and/or gender studies. However, since the proposal must receive the approval of the Confirmation Review Committee, it should not only be rigorous but also be clear enough to be understood by members of staff whose expertise may not be in the topic you have selected.

Structuring the proposal

PhD proposals take many forms depending on the topic and the style of presentation. It can be useful to consider the following components when planning the proposal structure. Whatever approach you take, it is important to provide sufficient information in a clear and coherent manner so that your supervisors and the reviewers can effectively evaluate it.

a) Title

The title shapes expectations and should be clear and informative, without being overlong.

b) Research objective(s) and questions

This states what the research project will deal with. In addition to stating your objective(s) and questions, you should provide an explanation of why these are relevant to the proposed research.

c) Importance of the research topic

A PhD thesis must make an original contribution to knowledge. Thus, you need to show how the proposed research is sufficiently important to justify your efforts (and the efforts of those you involve in your research). This should include a statement of how the solution to the problem, or answer to the question, can influence the field.

d) Review of significant prior research

The proposal should include a comprehensive review of the major scholarly literature that is relevant to your proposed research. You need to show the relationship between your research objective(s) and questions and this prior research.

e) Research methodology and methods

This section describes how you intend to answer your question and it should be as explicit as possible. The notion of methodology incorporates a wide range of possible approaches to the collection and analysis of information, from the case study or comparative method in empirical research to the analysis of concepts in theoretical research. Many projects will involve varying combinations of descriptive, analytical and normative approaches, and all projects should be informed by relevant theory and literature. The choice of method should be justified in terms of the questions being asked.

f) Ethical considerations

All university research is expected to conform to acceptable ethical standards and proposals for research which involve human participants must be approved prior to the Confirmation Review by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee.

g) Plans for the analysis of data

In this section you should describe how you will determine from the information you have gathered the answers to your research questions. In other words, 'How will you figure out what it all means?' For example, if you plan to use a case study approach, describe how you intend to identify the key themes and patterns in your data.

h) Proposed thesis structure

You should include an outline of the thesis structure, usually in the form of a list of chapter headings and subsidiary section headings or a brief narrative overview of each chapter. These will be subject to later change but will help shape your thoughts and confirm that you are considering the structure of the thesis as a whole.

i) Schedule of research

You should append a provisional timeline indicating the expected progress of your research, including time to be spent engaged in research away from Auckland.

j) References

All literature cited in the proposal should be listed at the end using a consistent citation style.

Planning for success

When developing a proposal, it is useful to remind yourself of what the examiners will be looking for in the final thesis when you have completed it:

- a distinct contribution to knowledge
- evidence of the discovery of new knowledge or the exercise of independent judgement
- literary presentation
- original work of merit worthy of publication
- evidence of competence and coherence in independent research
- understanding of concepts, issues and methodology
- critical use of published work and source materials

It takes work to ensure your research achieves these goals. A clear and coherent proposal provides a clear direction and support for you to successfully reach the final goal of completing your PhD thesis.