Code of Practice: Research Confirmation Panel

Overview:

As per Academic Regulation 5.6.7 and arising from a decision by a Department Research Review Panel; candidates may be required to complete the Research Confirmation (RC) Panel. In addition, the Panel will also consider applications from research students who wish to transfer from the master's to the PhD register.

The Panel will consider: (a) the report from the Research Review Panel; (b) a transcript of the student's results in the taught element of the programme, where applicable; (c) a written presentation of the research; and (d) a *viva voce* examination following presentation by the candidate of their research to an open forum attended by a board of members of faculty. There must be clear evidence that the candidate has the innate ability to understand the topic deeply enough and has shown the ability to undertake independent research work successfully appropriate to doctoral level.

1. Composition and role of the Research Confirmation Panel:

Approximately two weeks in advance of the confirmation examination, the supervisor(s) are required to initiate a Research Confirmation Panel by nominating the panel members and noting the members on (PGR-3a Part 1 form). The Research Confirmation Panel will consist of the Head of Department/School or his/her nominee who convenes the panel and act as chairperson, along with two independent panel members, one nominated by the Head of Department and the other nominated by the Assistant Dean Research. To be appointed, the independent panel members must satisfy the criteria of appointment of supervisor (as per section 5.5).

Where the student undertakes a structured PhD programme, the programme director may act as the independent panel member. The chairperson of the Research Confirmation Panel will act as the adviser to all research candidates presenting for review. The chairperson, independent panel member or programme director are not precluded from acting as an internal examiner at the examination stage. Furthermore, where the Head of Department/School is a supervisor of the research student, the Dean of Faculty or his/her nominee will assume the role of Head of Department/School or his/her nominee in acting as chairperson and nominating the independent member to the panel.

***Chairperson*:** The chairperson will normally be a senior faculty member who has supervised a PhD candidate to completion. Their role is to manage the confirmation process, ensuring that the candidate is treated fairly, to provide guidance on the University's academic regulations and practices and communicate the outcome of the examination to the candidate. The chairperson will make sure that all the required documentation is completed and communicate the outcome to the relevant parties.

***Examiners*:** The examiners' role is to ensure that the candidate has demonstrated the capability to undertake a doctoral programme of research successfully.

2. Research Confirmation report:

The members of the confirmation panel should receive the report at least two weeks in advance of the panel. The report should **not exceed** 8,000 words, including references/bibliography and should:

(a) Clearly define the research objectives.
(b) Include a critical literature review of the subject area(s) relating to the proposed research.
(c) Demonstrate the originality of the proposed research work, by referring to published material.
(d) Demonstrate an ability to write a report, in accordance with UL thesis specifications.
(e) Report on the research work carried out to date by the candidate; which demonstrates: (i) feasibility of the proposed research work; (ii) the ability of the candidate to carry out the proposed research work.
(f) Contain a work-plan showing the main steps required to complete the research objectives. This does not need to be very detailed, however, it should demonstrate that the candidate understands the steps and risks involved in working towards his/her research objectives.

3. Research Confirmation Presentation:

The research must be presented to the examination board and the supervisor(s) may attend as an observer(s) subject to faculty guidelines. The Supervisor(s) does not participate in either the examination or the final decision. The process will take the following structure:

(a) The candidate will make a presentation for up to thirty minutes of the work described in the confirmation report. In some departments/faculties, this presentation may be held in a public (faculty/university) forum. Where this forum is the custom and practice, this should be applied consistently to all candidates.

(b) After the presentation, an oral examination of the candidate for up to sixty minutes will be undertaken by the two examiners, with the chair. This should not take place in a public forum. The Research Confirmation Panel; should last no longer than one hour and thirty minutes.

4. Recommendations:

The Research Confirmation Panel may recommend one of the following options, based on their determination of whether the candidate's research has the potential to make an original research contribution:

a. The student's research progress is of a sufficiently high standard to warrant continuation on the masters or PhD register as applicable. (G)
b. The student's research progress on the master's register is of a sufficiently high standard to warrant transfer to the PhD register. (G)

c. The student's research progress on the PhD register is unsatisfactory and the student is transferred to the master's register. (T)

d. The student's research progress is unsatisfactory and the student's enrolment on the master's or PhD register, as applicable, should be discontinued. (W)

5. **Outcome**:

Candidates will be informed verbally of the outcome of the examination by the chairperson of the board on completion of the research confirmation process. The short panel report (PGR-3a.1) providing feedback on both the strengths and areas for consideration within the research must be distributed by the chair of the panel either immediately after or within one working day following the confirmation panel to both the candidate and supervisor(s) for review.

Prior to submitting the confirmation panel outcome on the research confirmation form (PGR-3a form) to (Academic Registry via TopDesk). The chairperson must confirm using aforementioned (PGR-3a) form that a separate research confirmation panel report (PGR-3a.1) has been issued to both the candidate and supervisor(s).

If successful, the candidate will be informed by the chairperson that the Research Confirmation Panel is not a guarantee that the candidate will be awarded a PhD. Similarly, continuation on the Masters' register is not a guarantee that the candidate will be awarded a Research Masters'.

Where a candidate is not satisfied with the outcome of the Research Confirmation Panel review, s/he may appeal the matter to the Head of Department/School. The appeal must be made within two weeks of the official publication of the research confirmation review grade. Details of the code of practice for the Research Progression Appeal Panel

In the event of a disagreement between the examiners pertaining to the outcome of the Research Confirmation Panel, the Chairperson will record that a disagreement has occurred, summarise the nature of the disagreement and suspend the Research Confirmation Panel. The matter will be forwarded to the Head of Department/ School for further review.