# BGL Confirmation of Candidature Research Proposal Guidelines

Your Confirmation of Candidature (CoC) research proposal will be loosely based on the research outline you prepared for admission to your degree, but will provide a more comprehensive outline of the literature, research questions, method and timeframe of your research. This is an important document as it is used to assess progress and the feasibility of your research program at the Confirmation of Candidature Milestone. Enrolment in HDR study is provisional until your candidature is confirmed.

The basic purpose of all research proposals are to convince the reader that: (a) the research project has clear objectives; (b) the research project is worth doing (it is significant / important in some sense and will make an original contribution to knowledge / understanding in the field); (c) the proposed methods are suitable and feasible; and (d) that there is a well thought through plan for achieving the research objectives in the available timeframe. (This is not to say that changes may not happen while undertaking the research, but having a plan reduces the likelihood of the unexpected arising.)

The exact elements and style of a Confirmation of Candidature (CoC) research proposal will vary from discipline to discipline. That said, this guide of suggested elements (including three substantive chapters: Introduction, Literature Review, Methods) will help you navigate your confirmation of candidature successfully and set you up for a successful program of higher degree research study.

## Suggested Components for Confirmation of Candidature Research Proposal

**1. Provisional Title**: Be concise and informative (<30 words).

**2. Other relevant information:** Degree you are studying, names of supervisors and date.

**3. Abstract**: Describe the broad area of your research, clearly state the objectives, knowledge gaps, research need and how you will achieve them (200-300 words).

**4. Table of contents**: Show the organisation of the text and help orient the reader.

**5. Introduction**

The introduction provides an overview of your research project, situates it in the broader field, and illustrates why the topic is important. This is the opportunity to tell us *why* your project area matters and *why now*. Some ways to outline this include:

- Explain the size, costs or adverse impacts of a problem you are addressing.
- Outline trends e.g. Is the problem getting worse? Or remaining stable but ignored?
- Outline challenges confronting government, policy or industry that require addressing. (This is particularly important for Industry PhD projects but apt for much HDR research in BGL.)
- Show the cultural significance of your research.
- Demonstrate disciplinary significance in terms of aiding progress in the field.

The introduction should also clearly outline the project research objectives and/or aims**.** Make sure your questions or goals aren't too broad, vague or ambitious. Also be careful of having too many questions as any independent assessor or examiner needs to be able to attest that every research objective has been achieved. One overarching objective and three sub-aims or research questions is a common PhD thesis design. But please talk to your supervisors about what is expected or the norm in your discipline and degree. In any case it is also important to scope your research topic appropriately so you can pursue manageable and achievable goals.

The introduction is also the place where it is important to define and explain any key terms that you will use in your thesis.

## 6. Literature Review

A literature review is a critical analysis of published literature on a particular topic. It is an assessment of the literature and provides a summary, classification, comparison and evaluation. A good literature review should find evidence to establish the need for the proposed research, establish your thesis in the chain of research in your field, show your assessors your familiarity with important research in your field and demonstrate your ability to use references appropriately.

• Use subheadings to organise the writing
• Use literature to support your arguments

The review of literature should lead to the unanswered questions or knowledge gaps in your field, providing the opportunity for you to clearly state the objectives of your research. The reader should be able to recognise how your research will make a *signification and original contribution* to your research field.

Relevant theory is also important in many disciplines to show where your research is positioned and how it will add to or extend existing theory. If that applies to your discipline, please discuss with your supervisors whether it is best to integrate the theory into your literature review or into the research methods and approach.

## 7. Research Methods

This section of your proposal should build on the background of your research and describe *how* you will answer your research questions. BGL HDRs use a large variety of methods ranging from in depth ethnography and interviews to doctrinal analysis to online surveys to econometrics to data linkage and big data analysis. Whether using quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods your research proposal should demonstrate you have a solid understanding of the methodologies you have chosen to use and why this adopted method is the best approach for your research. It should also reflect on the limitations of your proposed study design. The project methodology should also be appropriately scaled for the relevant degree.

Other aspects you may include are:
• Clarification of any samples chosen, sample sizes and approaches to recruitment
• The materials you will require or use
• Data analysis tools and programs
• Feasibility of the proposed project taking into account your skills and any performance development you have undertaken to date (or propose to do) to ensure you are equipped to undertake your research. (Here it is worth noting that building new skills is a natural part of undertaking HDR study, particularly under the guidance of your expert supervisors: just make ensure you allow sufficient time to master the skills).
• Any preliminary data analysis you have completed. (This is not expected pre CoC but we acknowledge some students will have preliminary data. In that case, including some can demonstrate proof of feasibility and worth of your project etc.)

## 8. Ethics or other required clearances

Will ethics be required for your project and if so, what is the status of this i.e. have you obtained ethics already or is your application under review? Where possible we encourage you to submit your application prior to your confirmation of candidature as this will provide important feedback on the feasibility of your study and maximise the time you will have for your data analysis.

It is also important to consider if any other approvals will be required for your project. This may be data access plans, institutional approvals or security clearance etc. If so, what is the plan to obtain these and what are your backup plans if they do not come through in time? Thinking through these questions will maximise your likelihood of getting though your milestone and put your HDR study on track for a timely completion.

## 9. Summary of progress in last 12 months

Provide an overview of key steps undertaken since commencement. This can include:

- Completion of university HDR induction
- Any professional development undertaken e.g. a library course on how to undertake a systematic review or a course on how to use SPSS or NVIVO.
- Presentations e.g. have you taken part in the HDR Spring Conference?
- Ethics applications
- Stakeholder liaison e.g. have you liaised with any stakeholders about your project? If so, which stakeholders? And how has this informed your thinking and research design? (This is an essential element for industry PhD projects).

## 10. Thesis completion plan

Provide a Gantt chart with the specific milestones and timelines of your research project. This should reinforce to the reader that your research approach is sound and feasible within the 3/3.5 year timeframe of a PhD project or within 2 years for a Masters project. Make sure you include your PhD submission in your timeline and any publications you plan to do along the way.

## 11. References

A bibliography or reference list for what you have written should be provided. It is suggested that you use an Author Date referencing system such as Harvard, as this makes it easier for assessors to see whether you are citing important work in the field and how up to date the references are, and what work has been done by your supervisors in this area. But please speak to you supervisors about the preferred referencing style in your discipline.

## <u>Other relevant details</u>

**Word length:**
This Research Proposal document including the literature review, should be approximately 10,000 (PhD) and 5,000 (Masters) words

**Flinders Thesis Template:**
https://students.flinders.edu.au/content/dam/student/hdr/examinations/thesis-template.docx

**HDR Completion Plan**
This can be undertaken using a gantt chart or word document or both. A gantt chart is often more helpful for Confirmation of Candidature to map out the stages of data collection, fieldwork, analysis, writing. The word document is often more useful in subsequent years to track progress of writing of the thesis. Links to both:
Gantt chart: https://students.flinders.edu.au/content/dam/student/hdr/hdr-milestone-planning-chart.xlsx
Progress of writing thesis: https://students.flinders.edu.au/content/dam/student/hdr/hdr-completion-plan.docx

**Resources**

- **Courses from the Office of Graduate Research (OGR)**
  The Office of Graduate Research run several courses on undertaking milestones. The course on undertaking your Confirmation of Candidature is particularly appropriate for anyone commencing their HDR studies.
- **Explaining your Significant and Original Contribution to Knowledge (SOCK)**
  These two videos have been done by the former Flinders Dean of Graduate Research - Professor Tara Brabazon.
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=--rjPTVw3no
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=fuET3bpwwdY