Variation of Candidature Procedure

Version	Approved by	Approval date	Effective date
4.1	Director of Governance and University Secretary	19 March 2025	19 March 2025

Procedure Statement

Purpose	This document outlines the processes for higher degree research (HDR) candidates to vary their candidature.
Scope	This procedure applies to all HDR candidates, their supervisors, Postgraduate Coordinators (PGCs) and Associate Deans of Research Training (ADRTs). The relevant Conditions for Award Policy should be read in conjunction with this procedure.
Are Local Documents on this subject permitted?	☒ Yes, however Local Documents must be consistent with this University-wide Document ☐ No

Procedure Processes and Actions

1. Introduction

This procedure provides information about how to apply for a variation to a higher degree research candidature, and the approval process. The types of variations of candidature that are included in this procedure are outlined below:

a) Change to research area

b) Changes to supervisory team

c) Transfer from one program to another within the University

d) Program leave

e) Request to work away from the University

f) Transfer between full-time (FT) and part-time (PT) enrolment

g) Request for overtime enrolment

h) Withdrawal or discontinuation of candidature

1.1. Individual circumstances

Candidates may apply to the Graduate Research School (GRS) to vary their candidature for a range of reasons. The following principles must be taken into consideration for each variation request:

a) Candidates should discuss any intended variation to candidature with their supervisors and can also seek advice and guidance from the PGC, or GRS candidature team.

b) The GRS must review and consider potential impacts to the candidature such as resources for the project, supervisory capacity, Commonwealth legislation, scholarship eligibility and student visa conditions. Also important is the progress to date in the program and the stage of candidature.

c) It is important that these issues are effectively addressed through the variation process to ensure the best outcome for the candidate.

2. Process for candidature variations

All variations must be submitted to the Graduate Research School via the Graduate Research Information System (GRIS) for review and processing.

a) Each variation request must be accompanied with appropriate supporting documentation as outlined on the GRS website.

b) Some variations such as change of enrolment status, program leave, and overtime requests must be submitted before the census date of the term in which the candidate is enrolled.

c) Variations are then reviewed and recommended by the supervisor/PGC/Higher Degree Committee (HDC) where appropriate.

d) All variations are reviewed by the GRS before being approved or denied by the Dean of Graduate Research or delegate.

3. Change to research area

A formal request to change research area may be required if candidates need to redefine their research area or project direction. The stage of candidature is important to consider for all candidates. International candidates who are impacted by Australian and UN Autonomous Sanctions legislation may need to be reassessed under those procedures. Candidates can request a change to research area through GRIS.

If the change to research area is substantial, it may require a transfer of supervision or program. See Section 4 for supervision and Section 5 for program transfers.

4. Changes to supervision

Appropriate supervision for a candidate is essential to ensure good quality outcomes including a positive candidate experience, a timely completion and the development of a high-quality research graduate. While supervision arrangements are established through the admissions process there are times when changes to the supervisory team are required during the candidature. Changes to supervision are managed in accordance with the *Higher Degree Research Supervision Procedure*.

4.1. Changes to supervision team

4.1.1. Changes in supervisory roles and/or additions to supervisory teams are possible and it is the candidate's responsibility to find new eligible supervisor/s and seek agreement from them to supervise. The University will support the candidate to do this.

4.1.2. In cases where there is not an eligible supervision team in place and the search for alternate supervision is so lengthy that it will impact the candidature, the candidate must take program leave until appropriate supervision is confirmed.

4.2. Changes because of a supervisory breakdown

In some instances, there may be a breakdown in a supervisor-candidate relationship. In such cases, the following process must be followed:

4.2.1. The PGC or Head of School will mediate to attempt to resolve the issues.

4.2.2. If no resolution can be found, the ADRT (or equivalent) will mediate to attempt to resolve the matter. If this is not successful, the matter must be referred to the Dean of Graduate Research. In such cases, independent mediation may be sought.

4.2.3. If mediation is unsuccessful and replacement supervisor/s have not been identified within a reasonable timeframe, the Dean of Graduate Research may require the candidate to take program leave until new suitable supervisor/s are found.

4.3. Discontinuation due to lack of supervision

4.3.1. If no alternative suitable supervision can be found within an appropriate length of time for the reasons listed in Section of 4.1 or 4.2 above, the Dean of Graduate Research may discontinue the candidature on the grounds of lack of appropriate supervision.

4.3.2. In some circumstances, the Dean may recommend that the candidate discontinue their candidature and re-apply with a new project and/or supervision team.

5. Program transfer

Candidates may apply to transfer to another HDR program during their candidature. Scholarship holders should refer to the *Higher Degree Research Scholarships Procedure* for information about transferring to another program and scholarships. All requests must be reviewed by the Faculty HDC.

5.1. Transferring HDR program at the same level

Candidates may wish to transfer from one HDR program to another (eg, Master to another Masters, or Doctorate to another Doctorate). Requests for program transfer must be submitted to the GRS for review

following a recommendation from the ADRT (or equivalent). The required documentation for requests will be listed on the GRS website, but as a minimum includes:

a) A research data management plan, revised as appropriate to the new program.

b) A research transfer agreement which outlines the conditions for authorship, materials, data, Intellectual Property, and ethics approvals where applicable.

5.2. Transfer from Masters to Doctorate

A transfer from a Masters level program to a Doctoral level program may be considered on a case-by-case basis and only in exceptional circumstances. Candidates must be at a minimum of 1.25 Full Time-Equivalent (FTE) in their candidature and cannot be overtime when applying for a transfer. In order to transfer to a Doctoral program from a Masters program, candidates must demonstrate the following to the HDC:

5.2.1. Eligibility for admission to the doctorate in accordance with the *Admission to Higher Degree Research Programs Procedure.*

5.2.2. Successful completion of all confirmation requirements at the doctoral level as outlined in the *Research Progress Review and Confirmation of Candidature Procedure*.

5.2.3. Evidence that the proposed doctoral project has been expanded to meet the higher level expectation of an original and substantial contribution to knowledge.

5.2.4. A detailed and feasible plan for completion within the acceptable timeframe as described in the Conditions of Award of the relevant degree.

5.2.5. An advanced draft Masters thesis which demonstrates evidence of substantial research progress. If publications are to be used in the draft, they must be incorporated as outlined in the Thesis Examination procedure.

5.2.6. Faculties may have specific requirements in addition to those listed above.

5.3. Transfer from Doctorate to Masters

In some cases, candidates may need to transfer from a Doctorate to a Masters level program. As with other transfers, requests must be submitted to the GRS for review with appropriate documentation as listed on the GRS website.

6. Leave

Candidates may request to take short term or longer term periods of leave from their program. To be eligible, a candidate must have completed at least one term of enrolment. International candidates must seek advice about their visa conditions and program leave.

6.1. Program leave

6.1.1. Program leave is on a term by term basis and should be requested before the census date of the term in which the candidate is enrolled. Candidates may only request up to 4 terms of program leave regardless of full time or part time status.

6.1.2. Leave requests beyond this must be considered by the Faculty HDC.

6.1.3. When a candidate is on approved leave, they are not enrolled and not consuming load in their candidature. Candidates must not conduct work towards their degree at any time while not enrolled in accordance with the relevant Conditions of Award for their degree.

6.2. Parental leave

6.2.1. For short periods of parental leave that are less than a term, no formal application is required, and enrolment status is maintained. Such absences should be discussed between the candidate, supervisor and School prior to the planned absence.

6.2.2. For periods of parental leave that are one term or more, applications must be made through GRIS as program leave. This includes second or further requests for parental leave.

6.2.3. If on scholarship, refer to the *Higher Degree Research Scholarships Procedure* for paid parental leave requirements.

6.3. Sick leave

6.3.1. For short periods of standard sick leave that are less than a term, no formal application is required, and enrolment status is maintained. Such absences should be discussed between the candidate, supervisor and School either prior to or at the time of the absence. Documentation about sick leave should be kept in case this impacts on candidature progress and should be recorded at the next Research Progress Review.

6.3.2. For cases of extended sick leave which require one term or more, candidates should seek advice from the GRS on the options. If longer than a term, candidates will be required to take program leave. Applications must be made through GRIS as program leave.

6.3.3. If on a scholarship, refer to the *[Higher Degree Research Scholarships Procedure](#)* for standard and extended sick leave entitlements.

6.4. Annual leave

6.4.1. All candidates are entitled to 20 days annual leave from their HDR program. This must be taken in each year of the program and cannot be accrued over multiple years.

6.4.2. Candidates must discuss annual leave plans with their supervisor/s. Annual leave does not require a formal application to the GRS. Candidates will remain enrolled for the term and candidature will remain unchanged.

6.5. Other leave

6.5.1. Leave that does not fall within the categories outlined in the sections above should be referred to the Dean of Graduate Research or Registrar for approval as outlined in Schedules 1 and 2 of UNSW Delegations.

7. Working away from UNSW

All candidates at UNSW must undertake their research at an approved location, such as a UNSW campus, teaching hospital, research field station, or research institute. This ensures they have access to the supervision, facilities, resources, a safe environment, and research community to successfully undertake their candidature. There may be times during candidature when a candidate needs to work away for research reasons (eg field work, global collaborations, industry collaborations).
Requests to work away from commencement are covered in the *Admissions to Higher Degree Research Procedure*, Section 2.2.1.

7.1 Principles and timing

7.1.1 Candidates may request to work away from an approved location for research reasons related to the research project.

7.1.2 Doctoral candidates must have successfully completed their confirmation review and Masters candidates must have successfully completed their first research progress review before they can request to work away.

7.1.3 Candidates must comply with the university's travel policies, health and safety policies, and HDR policies.

7.2 Duration and process

7.2.1 For work away periods less than one term, candidates should apply via the School/Faculty travel process.

7.2.2 For work away requests that are one term or longer, candidates must apply via the Graduate Research Information System (GRIS) prior to commencing the work away period.

7.2.3 Work away requests that are longer than one year will be considered by the Faculty Higher Degree Committee.

7.2.4 Applications for work away must provide an engagement plan, which includes information on how the candidate will have access to supervision (including a local supervisor),

resources and facilities, access to the research community and addresses health and safety measures.

7.2.5   Candidates should notify the Graduate Research School when they have returned to campus following a period of work away.

7.3   Work away for personal reasons

7.3.1   The university does not support external enrolment unless there is a compelling research reason and a comprehensive engagement plan that addresses how the candidate has appropriate access to supervision, facilities and resources, and the UNSW research community.

7.3.2   For cases where a candidate needs to be based away from UNSW for personal reasons (eg employment or family), these will be assessed by the Dean of Graduate Research on a case-by-case basis.

7.3.3   A compelling case will need to be presented that ensures the candidate has appropriate access to supervision, facilities and resources, and the UNSW research community.

7.3.4   Candidates in receipt of a scholarship who wish to work away from UNSW should consult the HDR scholarships procedure for ongoing eligibility requirements.

8.   Transfer to part time or full time enrolment

Candidates may request a change to their enrolment status from part time to full time or the reverse. For the change to be applied to the current term and an accurate consumption recorded, the request must be submitted to the GRS before the census date of the term. Changes to a candidate's enrolment may only be approved by the Dean of Graduate Research.

8.1.   International candidates

International candidates have conditions on their visa which may limit the circumstances under which part time enrolment can be approved. International candidates should seek advice from the GRS before requesting a change to enrolment status.

8.2.   Scholarship considerations

Changes to part time enrolment for scholarship recipients can have an impact on eligibility as scholarships are typically for full time candidates. Part time scholarships are only approved under certain circumstances in accordance with the *Higher Degree Research Scholarship Procedure* and are considered taxable by the Australian Taxation Office. Candidates should seek advice from the GRS of these requirements before submitting their variation to enrolment status.

9.   Over-time enrolment

Circumstances may arise during a candidature where the research is not progressing as planned. In such cases, candidates may need to apply for over-time enrolment beyond the maximum period permitted for completion of a degree.

Progress reviews must be run in accordance with the *Research Progress Review and Confirmation of Candidatures Procedure.*

9.1.   Recent research progress review

In order to apply for over-time enrolment, a candidate must have had a research progress review within the last 3 months (full time equivalent) which includes the following information:

- Intended submission date;
- Outline of chapter structure of the thesis;
- Percentage of each chapter that is complete;
- Status of supervisory review for each chapter; and
- Reasons for the delay in submission.

New milestones will be set at this review.

9.2. Requests for over-time enrolment

9.2.1. Candidates apply for over-time enrolment through GRIS with appropriate documentation Once the research progress review has been held.

9.2.2. Candidates must apply before the census date of the term in which they wish to be enrolled.

9.2.3. Candidates can request up to 1.0 EFTSL of over-time enrolment. This is 4 terms for full time candidates and 8 terms for part time candidates.

9.2.4. All requests must be approved by the supervisor and the PGC or Head of School before review by the Associate Dean Research Training (or equivalent) and approval by the Dean of Graduate Research.

9.2.5. The GRS will notify the candidate in writing of whether the request for over-time has been approved.

9.3. Follow up progress review

9.3.1. Candidates that have been approved for over-time enrolment must participate in a follow up review in approximately 0.25 EFTSL (3 months full time, 6 months part time) following the last review unless they have already submitted their thesis for examination.

9.3.2. The purpose of this review is to check that the candidate is on track to submit by the newly approved submission date and is meeting agreed milestones.

9.3.3. If the candidate has not achieved the milestones and is not on track to submit their thesis, they may be asked to Show Cause in accordance with the *Show Cause for Research Candidates Guideline.*

10. Withdrawal of candidature

Candidates may choose to withdraw from their HDR program for a range of reasons.

a) Candidates should first discuss withdrawal of candidature with their supervisor/s and can also seek advice from the GRS.

b) Candidates must submit a variation request to withdraw from their candidature via GRIS. No additional approvals for withdrawal of candidature are required.

c) Candidates will be notified in writing once the withdrawal has been processed.

11. Discontinuation of candidature

There may be circumstances where the candidate is discontinued from an HDR program by the University. These circumstances are outlined in Sections 11.1 to 11.4 below.

11.1. Lapsed candidature

11.1.1. Candidates must enrol each term to continue their candidature. Failure to re-enrol will result in a lapsed candidature notice being sent to the candidate

11.1.2. Candidates who fail to respond to a lapsed candidature notice or who make an inadequate response may have their candidature discontinued by the University.

11.1.3. If the candidature is discontinued, the candidate will be notified in writing.

11.1.4. Candidates who are discontinued due to lapsed candidature may apply for re-admission in the future. This process is covered in the Admission to Higher Degree Research Programs Procedure. Any subsequent permitted enrolment will be conditional on meeting requirements specified in writing by the Dean of Graduate Research.

11.2. Replacement supervision unavailable

11.2.1. If replacement supervision is not able to be confirmed within a reasonable timeframe, discontinuation of candidature may be required as outlined in Section 4 and the *Higher Degree Research Supervision Procedure.*

11.2.2. If the candidature is discontinued, the candidate will be notified in writing.

11.3. Financial inability to support candidature

11.3.1. Candidates should inform their supervisor and PGC if they are experiencing financial stress and, where possible, this should be addressed at the School level.

11.3.2. If continued financial difficulties are experienced the matter should be referred to the Dean of Graduate Research to evaluate the case and determine whether discontinuation of enrolment is appropriate.

11.3.3. If a candidate no longer has the financial capacity to support themselves and any dependants, the University may discontinue their candidature.

11.3.4. If the candidature is discontinued, the candidate will be notified in writing.

11.4. As the result of an unsatisfactory response to Show Cause

11.4.1. In cases where a candidate has been asked to Show Cause in accordance with the *Research Progress Review and Confirmation of Research Candidates Procedure* and *Show Cause for Research Candidates Guideline*. A failure to respond or an unsatisfactory response may result in having the candidature discontinued by the University.

11.4.2. If the candidature is discontinued, the candidate will be notified in writing.

Accountabilities	
Responsible Officer	Dean of Graduate Research
Contact Officer	Director, Graduate Research School

Supporting Information	
Legislative Compliance	This Procedure supports the University's compliance with the following legislation: *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021* (Cth) *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000* (Cth) *National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018* (Cth)
Parent Document (Policy)	Conditions for Award of Doctor of Philosophy Policy Conditions for Award of Master of Philosophy Policy Conditions for Award of Master by Research Policy
Related Documents	Admissions Policy Admission to Higher Degree Research Programs Procedure Facilities and Resources to Support Higher Degree Candidates Guideline Delegations Policy Health and Safety Policy Higher Degree Research Scholarships Policy Higher Degree Research Scholarships Procedure Higher Degree Research Supervision Policy Higher Degree Research Supervision Procedure Research Progress Review and Confirmation of Candidatures Procedure Show Cause for Research Candidates Guideline Section 5 of Finance Policy
Superseded Documents	Variation of Candidature Procedure, v4.0

Revision History				
Version	**Approved by**	**Approval date**	**Effective date**	**Sections modified**
1.0	Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)	23 October 2012	23 October 2012	New procedure
2.0	Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research	4 May 2017	4 May 2017	Full review
2.1	Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research	22 August 2017	22 August 2017	Section 4.5
2.2	President and Vice-Chancellor	5 November 2018	1 January 2019	Minor amendment to accommodate 3+ calendar
3.0	Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Enterprise	10 June 2021	10 June 2021	Full review
4.0	Pro Vice-Chancellor Research Training	9 September 2024	9 September 2024	Full review
4.1	Director of Governance and University Secretary	19 March 2025	19 March 2025	Administrative updates to align with Delegations Schedules.