

THE PHD CONFIRMATION REVIEW PROCESS

Guidelines for Students, Academic Supervisors and Reviewers

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CONTENTS

1. THE CONFIRMATION REVIEW PROCESS	2
1.1 <i>What is the Confirmation Review?</i>	2
1.2 <i>When does Confirmation Review take place?</i>	2
1.3 <i>The Role of the Director of Teaching and Learning Postgraduate</i>	2
2. THE CONFIRMATION REVIEW REPORT	2
3. THE CONFIRMATION PANEL: SELECTING REVIEWERS	3
4. THE ROLE OF REVIEWERS	4
5. THE CONFIRMATION INTERVIEW	4
5.1 <i>Organising the Date of the Confirmation Interview</i>	4
5.2 <i>Submitting the Confirmation Report</i>	4
5.3 <i>Who attends the Confirmation Interview?</i>	5
5.4 <i>How long will the Confirmation Interview Last?</i>	5
5.5 <i>What will happen during the Confirmation Interview?</i>	5
6. CONFIRMATION REVIEW PROCESS OUTCOMES	6

1. THE CONFIRMATION REVIEW PROCESS

1.1 What is the Confirmation Review?

As set out clearly in the Programme Handbook for Postgraduate Research Students, 2018-19 (https://www.tcd.ie/swsp/assets/pdf/Handbooks/PhD/Course%20Handbook_Postgraduate%20Research%20Students_2018-2019.pdf), the confirmation Review – which is a stringent process of academic assessment for all Ph.D. students to confirm their continuation on the Ph.D. register – is a key milestone along the Ph.D. journey.

1.2 When does Confirmation Review take place?

For full-time Ph.D. students the confirmation review shall normally be arranged within the first 18 months of registration (for both September and March registration dates).

For part-time Ph.D. students the confirmation review shall normally be arranged within the first 30 months of registration (for both September and March registration dates).

1.3 The Role of the Director of Teaching and Learning Postgraduate

It is the responsibility of the Director of Teaching and Learning Postgraduate (DTLPG) to contact academic supervisors to let them know that their Ph.D. student(s) is required to complete the confirmation review process in accordance with the time line set out above for full- and part-time Ph.D. students, respectively. Both the supervisor(s) and the student should also receive reminders about the confirmation review process via their mytcd.ie portals. Thereafter, it is the academic supervisor's responsibility to communicate with the DTLPG on the matter of proposed dates for the confirmation interview. The date of the confirmation interview must be agreed by the DTLPG, student and the confirmation panel (see Section 5.1).

Students and their academic supervisors are expected to be aware of the requirements related to confirmation review process and to be familiar with the relevant rules and regulations as set out in the Calendar Part III

<https://www.tcd.ie/calendar/graduate-studies-higher-degrees/>

2. THE CONFIRMATION REVIEW REPORT

The confirmation process requires the student to prepare a Ph.D. confirmation report. This report should not exceed 7,000 words (excluding bibliography and footnotes). The format of the report will vary according to the nature of the research project but as a general guideline, may include:

- (a) an introductory section stating the research aims, critically reviewing existing literature to inform the formulation and specification of the research question(s)
- (b) a theoretical and/or conceptual section which includes a discussion of how theoretical or conceptual aspects informed the project
- (c) a section on methodology which discusses the design, access and sampling, data collection tools, data analysis technique(s) as well as ethical issues
- (d) a timetable/timeline for the completion of the research
- (e) a list of references

Students are advised to discuss the content of the confirmation report with their academic supervisor(s).

3. THE CONFIRMATION PANEL: SELECTING REVIEWERS

It is the responsibility of the academic supervisor(s) – in consultation with the student – to select two reviewers and to gain the agreement of those individuals to act as reviewers.
Selected reviewers should have acknowledged expertise in the subject area of the student's research (or in a cognate field). The DTLPG (or her/his nominee) will Chair the confirmation interview.

Reviewers can be:

- A member of academic staff in the School of Social Work and Social Policy,
- A member of academic staff in another School/Department at Trinity College Dublin.
- A member of academic staff in another Irish university.

Please Note:

- One reviewer must be internal to the School of Social Work and Social Policy.
- The School of Social Work and Social Policy is not in a position to pay any travel or accommodation costs related to the confirmation process.

It is recommended that these Guidelines are circulated by the academic supervisor(s) to invited reviewers.

The DTLPG will Chair the confirmation interview. The DTLPG may act as a reviewer but, normally, only if s/he has expertise in the subject area of the student's research.

If the DTLPG is acting as a reviewer, her/his nominee will Chair the confirmation interview.

If the DTLPG is a supervisor of a Ph.D. student whose work is under review, her/his nominee will Chair the confirmation interview.

4. THE ROLE OF REVIEWERS

Individuals who agree to undertake the role of reviewer do so on the understanding that they have a responsibility to read the student's work and provide a considered view on the student's proposed Ph.D. research. Reviewers may wish to comment on, query or seek clarification on any aspect of the student's research, including but not limited to the following: the research questions; proposed methodological approach; the epistemological or theoretical underpinnings of the research; proposed data collection (including recruitment and sampling strategies) and data analysis procedures; ethical considerations guiding the conduct of the research; any perceived related issues or potential challenges.

Students, academic supervisors and the DTLPG acknowledge and appreciate the considerable investment of time on the part of individuals who agree to act as reviewers.

The confirmation interview will be conducted in the spirit of reviewers providing *constructive* commentary on and critique of the student's work.

Reviewers may have legitimate queries or concerns about the proposed research or hold critical views on the proposed methodological/theoretical approach. In this event:

- Reviewers are expected to discuss aspects of the proposed research incrementally (not posing several questions at once) and to allow the student the time and opportunity to respond to individual questions, queries or critiques.
- Even if reviewers have significant concerns about an aspect or aspects of the proposed research, the student should leave a confirmation interview feeling supported rather than feeling personally undermined by the process.

5. THE CONFIRMATION INTERVIEW

5.1 Organising the Date of the Confirmation Interview

The academic supervisor(s) is responsible for proposing and agreeing the date/time of the confirmation interview in consultation with the student, the Ph.D. confirmation panel and the DTLPG. It is recommended that the academic supervisor, in consultation with reviewers and the student, proposes possible dates to the DTLPG in the first instance.

5.2 Submitting the Confirmation Report

The confirmation report should be submitted to the DTLPG by the student (copied to her/his academic supervisor) at least three weeks ahead of the agreed date for the confirmation interview. The DTLPG will then circulate the report to the confirmation panel (the student should provide the names and email addresses of the selected reviewers).

It is the responsibility of the student to submit the confirmation report to her/his academic supervisor(s) for review well in advance of the three-week lead-in time to the confirmation interview. Submission of the confirmation report to her/his supervisor(s) for review is purely a matter for the supervisor(s) and the student to consider and agree.

5.3 Who attends the Confirmation Interview?

The confirmation interview will be attended by the Ph.D. student, academic supervisor(s), the confirmation panel and the DTLPG (or her/his nominee).

5.4 How long will the Confirmation Interview Last?

The confirmation interview will normally last for 1 hour (approximately) and should not exceed 1.5 hours. If a confirmation interview extends for more than 1.5 hours, the student will be offered the option of taking a break.

5.5 What will happen during the Confirmation Interview?

The student can expect to enter into a detailed discussion about their Ph.D. research and will be expected to respond to any questions or queries that the reviewers may have about: the research questions/proposed research design/proposed theoretical framework (where relevant)/the feasibility of the proposed research/the timeline for the conduct of that research/any ethical issues or considerations relevant to the proposed research.

Reviewers may wish to raise issues, as deemed relevant by them, about any aspect(s) of the research about which they require clarification or have concerns.

Students will be given the opportunity to respond to all questions. The academic supervisor(s) will not intervene during this period of discussion. However, following the discussion period, reviewers may ask the academic supervisor(s) to comment and/or express their views on the feedback and comments provided by them to the student.

Following reviewers' questions, the student and supervisor(s) may be asked to leave the room for a short period (normally no more than 10 minutes). The DTLPG (or her/his nominee) will then ask the student and supervisor(s) to return, at which point the outcome of the review process will be communicated to the student.

6. CONFIRMATION REVIEW PROCESS OUTCOMES

The recommendation of the confirmation panel shall be one of the following:

- a. The student is confirmed to continue on the Ph.D. register. Reviewers may wish to make verbal suggestions or recommendations related to any aspect of the student's research but no further written documentation on the part of the student is required.
- b. The student is confirmed to continue on the Ph.D. register after some minor changes have been made to the Ph.D. confirmation report. These changes should normally be made and submitted by the student to her/his reviewers (copied to DTLPG or her/his nominee and to her/his academic supervisor(s)) within 2-3 weeks. There is no requirement for a second confirmation interview.
- c. Continuation on the Ph.D. register is not recommended at this time. A new report (7,000 words maximum) has to be written by the student and a second confirmation interview will be held as soon as possible. Candidates are typically expected to submit the new report within about 6 weeks. The new confirmation interview will be held within approximately 2 weeks thereafter.
- d. A recommendation to change to the general Masters register to submit a Master's thesis. This Master's thesis should normally be submitted by the end Year 2 (for full-time students) or end of Year 3 (for part-time students).
- e. Not to continue as a postgraduate research student.

Students who have queries related to the confirmation review process should contact their academic supervisor. The DTLPG is available to answer any questions that extend beyond the content of this document or the regulations set out in the Calendar Part III.