# Your Master of Philosophy Candidature Lifecycle: Progress and Milestones

As a Master of Philosophy (MPhil) candidate, you will develop a research plan specific to your project and your particular goals and, together with your advisory panel, regularly review and update your plan in terms of what needs to be prioritised or redefined.

Your progress through your candidature will be monitored and documented by a series of formal progress reports and compulsory milestones. This regular reporting provides an opportunity for you and your advisory team to reflect on your progress, your supervision, resources available to you and identify any barriers that could impact either your candidature or your timely completion. Your research plan will also be submitted to the GRS along with each of the milestone forms.

Think of each milestone and progress report as a stepping-stone to completion.
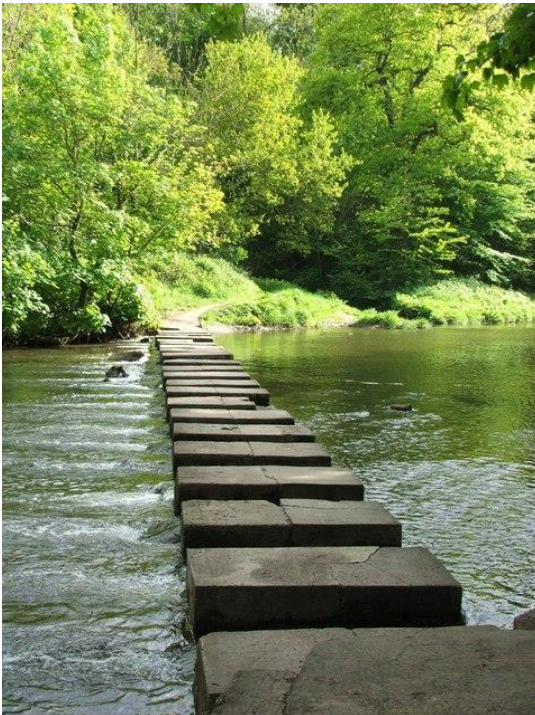
Milestones

There are five formal milestones in the lifecycle of an MPhil candidature:

- Candidate/Advisor Agreement
- Confirmation of Candidature*
- Pre-Completion*
- Thesis Submission and Examination*
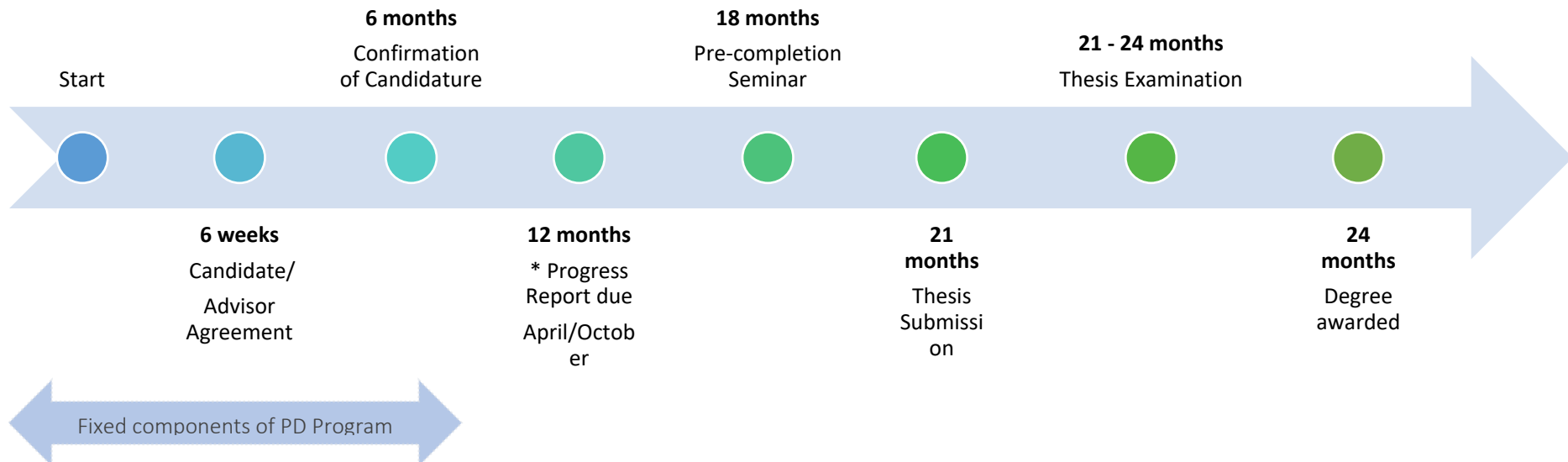- Response to Examiner Reports

Progress Reporting

Additionally, there are two progress reporting periods each year: 1 November to 30 April and 1 May to 31 October. If you have not completed a major milestone* during a reporting period, you and your Advisor will be required to submit a Progress Report.

Detailed information on each milestone can be found in the HDR Milestones and Reporting Procedure and in sections below that will help you navigate through each stage of your MPhil candidature.

Progress Support. In the event that you experience a setback to your expected progress, additional support is available to you through the HDR Progress Support Strategy. You can find more detailed information here.

Master of Philosophy Timeline

Compulsory Professional Development to be completed by Confirmation

6 months
Confirmation of Candidature

18 months
Pre-completion Seminar

21 - 24 months
Thesis Examination

Start

6 weeks
Candidate/ Advisor Agreement

12 months
* Progress Report due April/October

21 months
Thesis Submission

**24 months**
Degree awarded

Fixed components of PD Program

*Progress report due every six months except if a milestone (Confirmation of Candidature or Pre-Completion Evaluation) has been completed successfully in the previous six months

A full-time MPhil candidature will follow the following timeline (double the due dates for part-time)

Candidate Advisor Agreement	Six weeks from commencement
Confirmation of Candidature	Six months full time equivalent
Pre-Completion Milestone	One year and six months from commencement
Thesis Submission and Examination	One year and nine months from commencement
Consideration of Examiners' Reports	To be completed before 2 years full time equivalent

Beginning your MPhil Candidature:
Preparing for Confirmation of Candidature
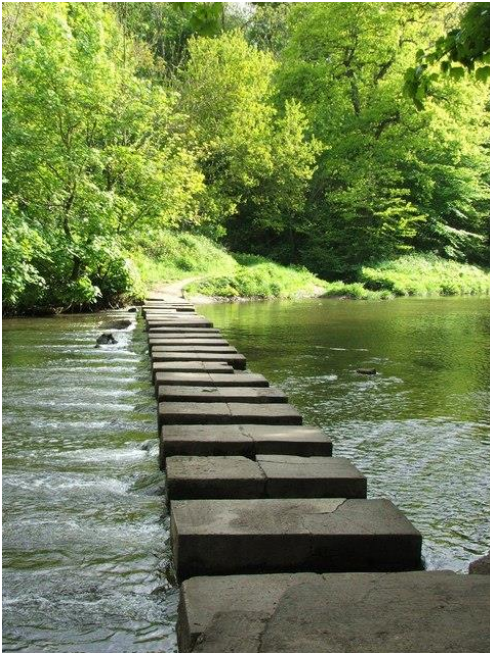
These tips are for MPhil candidates and their advisors to consider as you prepare for the confirmation of your candidature (after reaching the six-month full-time candidature equivalent point).

Confirmation is a crucial stage of candidature - the time when your provisional enrolment is confirmed. This guide provides advice on how to prepare and plan for this phase. Our aim is to help answer the following:

… do I have a clear direction for my research and my thesis?
… is my project of sufficient scope and standard for a Master of Philosophy degree?
… am I resourced and ready to begin the next phase of my candidature?"

What is Confirmation of Candidature?

Preparing for Confirmation of Candidature provides you with a scaffolded approach to starting your research studies. It forms the basis of your first discussions and work with your advisory team and ensures that the scope and focus of your study will meet the requirements of the Master of Philosophy degree. You must aim to have your candidature confirmed at the six-month (full time equivalent) mark. Under exceptional circumstances only, you may apply for an extension of up to three months.

The Candidature Committee reviews your work to assess whether:

- your proposed research is feasible and achievable in the time available (two years full-time equivalent) and if the outcomes of that work are likely to meet the award requirements

- your presentation of the work to date demonstrates appropriate progress in developing the research skills and capacities that are needed to conduct the research at the appropriate level.

Experts beyond your advisory team provide formative feedback to support you and your research. This type of review is part of the life of the researcher and your capacity to engage with and respond to feedback is designed to contribute to your research training experience.

Components of the milestone

There are two major components to the completion of Confirmation of Candidature, RM7001 (Research Proposal) and RM7002 (Literature Review). Together these separate components form the basis for assessing your eligibility for confirmation of candidature. The work in each is complementary and together represent the outcomes that are reasonable to expect from a candidate after six months of full-time study or 12 months of part-time study in an MPhil degree.

Your Confirmation Seminar is a 30 minute (plus questions) public presentation where you present this work to your Candidature Committee, your colleagues, fellow candidates and friends. You should contact the Academic Services Officer in your College for help in arranging your seminar.

You can find all the related procedure, forms and template on the GRS website, here.

Timeline

As soon as possible after course enrolment	▪ Set a timeline for preparation of the literature review and professional development ▪ Set the seminar date and download and review the COC_Proposal Template. ▪ Review the GRS emails and website to ensure you complete the required compulsory training components
4-6 weeks prior to seminar	▪ Submit literature review to Advisory Panel for comment
4 weeks prior to seminar	▪ Make amendments to research proposal in accordance with Expert Reviewer's report
2-4 weeks prior to seminar	▪ Complete the Professional Development Audit and Plan in Appendix 1 of the COC_Proposal Template in discussion with your Advisory Panel
2 weeks prior to seminar	▪ Advisors complete RD7001/RM7001 Advisory Panel Report on COC_Assessment Form
1 week prior to seminar	▪ Finalise the literature review and submit it with COC-Proposal Template, COC_Assessment Form and revised Candidate Advisor Agreement to the Candidature Committee

Notes on using the template

The COC-Proposal Template provides a guide and format for the preparation of the Research Proposal and associated documents including the Professional Development Audit and Plan, and Budget as required. The Research Proposal that will be sent to the expert reviewer does not require inclusion of any appendices. The Final version of the Template to be submitted with COC-Assessment Form one week prior to the Seminar must include all required appendices. The Literature review does not form part of the template but must be attached to the COC-Assessment Form.

Tips for Success

- If you are late with your Confirmation of Candidature, you are also likely to be overdue with finalising your thesis. If you start well, you are likely to finish well.
- Familiarise yourself with the requirements of the Research Proposal and Literature Review subjects (RM7001 and RM7002).
- Familiarise yourself with the requirements for this milestone and the templates and assessment forms that are used so you understand how you will be assessed (HDR Milestone and Reporting Procedure)
- Participate in the Graduate Research School's Professional Development Program to ensure that you complete the fixed components.
- Start preparing your proposal, substantive written work (usually a literature review) and seminar well in advance. Written work is likely to require multiple drafts before it reaches the standard expected of an MPhil candidate.
- Improve your proposal by incorporating comments from your Advisory Panel
- Ask other members of your research group or professional colleagues to critique your work as they will give valuable feedback.
- Practise your seminar, including at least once in the place in which you'll be presenting it publicly – be that face-to-face or by live-feed. Many candidates now present via Zoom, so discuss the arrangements with your advisory panel and make your preparations accordingly.
- Time your seminar and keep within the recommended timeframe of 25-35 minutes.
- If you will be using a PowerPoint presentation, check that your slides are legible from the rear of the seminar room or on a computer screen.
- Take opportunities to build your networks and engage with your peers – support is critical to success.

Review and refresh your Candidate and Advisor Agreement

As you move through this milestone and on to the next stage of your candidature you should meet with your advisory team to revisit your Candidate and Advisor Agreement.

Prompts to frame your thinking and conversations with your advisors as you move ahead include:

- Craft: Can you outline your planned research?
- Pivot: Consider whether you need to modify any part of the plans for your research as you move into the next phase. Being ready, able and willing to modify elements of your research is a normal part of life as a researcher.

- Plan: Think about your candidature lifecycle and look to the requirements of your next milestones (pre-completion). Plan your time and resources to make sure you are on track. There is a useful timeline in the HDR Candidate Handbook that you can use to help plan.

Notes for the Advisory Panel

Please be aware that in working with your MPhil Candidate toward Confirmation of Candidature it is your role to help them ensure they frame their topic to ensure that its scope and focus is achievable within the time and resources available.

To assist you in this work there are a series of compulsory steps that all candidates must undertake intended to ensure they are aware of degree requirements, they have access to services to support their skills development and that they are aware of their responsibilities in working with you.

Working from day one we envisage the planning for the first milestone, Confirmation of Candidature will begin and that the Research Proposal and Literature Review will inform your work together.

Please work with the candidate and College Academic Services Officer (ASO) to plan a realistic date for the Seminar - accounting for student progress and availability of panel members. The key materials to be aware of can all be viewed here including subject outlines, the template and the form. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your College ASO or the Graduate Research School. These considerations should address any need to revisit the research plan in terms of its continued suitability, the candidate's progress and any other matters that might impact the likelihood of timely completion.

Please note that there is no requirement for external review of MPhil work at Confirmation of Candidature.

Your work with the candidate will culminate at least one week prior to the seminar with your approval by signature of COC-Assessment Form.

The Second Half of your MPhil Candidature:
Approaching and navigating the Pre-Completion phase
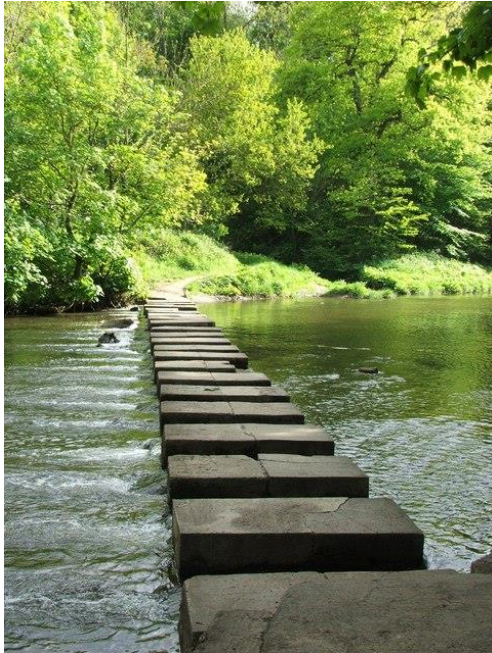
These tips are for MPhil candidates and their advisors to consider as you move into the second half of your candidature and begin to navigate the final stages.

These second half of candidature can be challenging. This guide is intended to provide advice on what is required and how to prepare and plan for this phase.

By the time you reach your pre-completion milestone – at 1.5 years full time equivalent – you should be able to synthesise the results of your research and present and defend them in a public seminar.

Review your Candidate and Advisor Agreement

As you move into the second year (full-time equivalent) of your candidature, you should work with your panel to ensure you have a shared understandings of key expectations of the completion phase.

Here are some ways of thinking about those conversations and questions that you might use to inform thinking, planning, and preparation. These are offered as guides - you should modify them as needed:

Craft:	Can you detail your planned thesis structure?
Pivot:	Do you need to modify your plans for the thesis to bring it to completion on time? Does this mean shifting the structure, or changing the scope of the work?
Plan:	What is your planned pre-completion date, and what needs to happen to complete that milestone on time? What is your planned thesis submission date for examination and what needs to happen to meet that forecast deadline?
Negotiate:	How do your plans fit in with others' timetables and commitments? How can you modify timelines and processes together to suit everyone?
Communicate:	Discuss needs early and revisit plans with your advisors, peers or critical friends as needed
Reach out:	Do you need help to articulate your needs with your advisors, especially around feedback timeframes and other important matters? Do you need help interpreting advisor feedback?
Create support:	What support do you need from advisors, peers, or other critical friends?

Craft, Pivot and Plan

1. It is useful to find a thesis in your discipline that you can use as a reference. Find one that is easy to read and has a structure that aligns with what you have planned for your thesis. Check the JCU Thesis Collection

2. Consider whether you need to modify any part of the plans for your research as you move into the next phase. Remember, being ready, able and willing to modify elements of your research is a normal part of life as a researcher.

3. Work with your advisory team to build a timeline that accounts for the work to be completed and the requirements of the thesis. Helpful advice on thesis structure and length can be found here.

4. A strategy you may find useful to plan next steps is based on Brown, 1994[i]:

- *What are the component parts of your thesis (e.g., chapters, papers, exegesis and creative work)?*
- *Detail the title of each chapter and write a short abstract to describe the argument the section makes and how it contributes to the whole. Are the abstracts an introduction to the chapters?*
- *Create a master file that contains all the component parts. In each part include all the written work you have done for that part to date.*
- *Review the master file with your advisor and identify what research remains to be done. Consider if this work is essential to the thesis?*
- *Prepare a timeline to conduct all outstanding work, including work yet to be written.*
- *Commit to a realistic submission timeline with check in and feedback meetings. As each piece is submitted you can move to the next phase. Advisors can divide up the review work to optimise application of the expertise, ensuring quality feedback.*
- *Once all sections are complete, review the work as a whole. Ensure you can see the coherence between the chapters and consistency of the argument presented throughout the thesis.*
- *The introduction and conclusion are usually the last sections finalised. The intervening chapters highlight the significant contribution which you speak of in the introduction and conclusion.*

5. Think about **examiner expectations**. Examiners will review your work and recommend an outcome. The process might include looking at the table of contents and bibliography to see consistent use of disciplinary practices in your work. Thesis reading may focus on sections aligned with an individual examiner's expertise. The result will be written feedback and recommendations. Examiners are looking for evidence to recommend that the thesis be passed! Review the HDR Thesis examination form together and consider if your thesis addresses all the criteria.

Build Your Support to Conquer your Barriers

You are likely to find yourself needing all kinds of support as you navigate your way through this final phase of your candidature. Here are some common barriers, some links and suggested ways to deal with them:

Barriers	Resources and Strategies
I am not ready to complete	Trust your advisory team to give you guidance. Seek reassurance from counsellors and trusted peers. Find friends with experience to give feedback and support you.
I need help with writing	Academic and Thesis Writing Workshops

	Thesis Preparation Resources Library Guides and Events
I need help with formatting	Thesis Preparation Resources Capstone Editing Elite Editing
I need help with references and citations	Referencing Do a quick iThenticate report to check you haven't accidentally plagiarized
I need help with editing	Capstone Editing Elite Editing
I need help with version control or access to my data	Using Microsoft for Thesis Production
I'm procrastinating	Find someone to be accountable to - your roommate, partner, best friend, child, parents, neighbour or colleague. Ask if you can report back to them on what you did yesterday. Share success, and report on incremental progress or setbacks. See useful resources here and here
I don't feel committed to completing	Revisit your candidate and advisor agreement and note commitment to mini milestones to support your steps to submission*.

** If you do have priorities that mean you can't pay full attention to your thesis, consider taking a leave of absence until those priorities are addressed. Government support of your tuition fees is limited. You need to manage your enrolled time to avoid extra personal costs that will arise as you progress candidature. If you have received a scholarship with living allowance, it is not likely this will be available after you reach the 3.5 year full-time equivalent point. If you are an international student there will also be challenges to obtain visa and tuition fee sponsorship extensions.

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[i] Brown, R. (1994). 'The 'Big Picture' About Managing Writing', in Zuber-Skerrit, O., Ryan, Y. (eds) Quality in Postgraduate Education, chapter 8, pp. 90–109. London, UK: Kogan Page. **Google Scholar**