



THE PHD CONFIRMATION REVIEW PROCESS

**Guidelines for Students, Academic Supervisors and
Thesis Committee Members**

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September 2023

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1. THE CONFIRMATION REVIEW PROCESS

1.1 *What is the Confirmation Review?*

As set out clearly in the Handbook for Postgraduate Research Students, 2020-21 (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

Since September 2019, a Thesis Committee is appointed for all new entrants to the PhD register within two months of registration. The Thesis Committee members also act as the student's confirmation panel. The DRLPG or her/his appointee will Chair the Confirmation interview.

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

4. THE ROLE OF THE CONFIRMATION PANEL

Thesis Committee members who agree to undertake this role do so on the understanding that they will also act as the student's confirmation panel. This means that they have a responsibility to read the student's work and provide a considered view on the student's proposed Ph.D. research, progress and so on. Confirmation panel members 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 Thesis Committee members in the Confirmation Review Process.

The confirmation interview will be conducted in the spirit of confirmation panel members providing *constructive* commentary on and critique of the student's work. Confirmation panel members may have legitimate queries or concerns about the proposed research or hold critical views on the proposed methodological/theoretical approach. In this event:

- Confirmation panel members 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 confirmation panel members 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

The confirmation interview will be held either in person or remotely via Zoom in accordance with College and public health guidelines.

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 confirmation panel 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 panel members).

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.

Confirmation panel members 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, panel members 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 questions from the confirmation panel, the student and supervisor(s) may be asked to leave the meeting for a short period (normally no more than 10 minutes). The DTLPG (or her/his nominee) will tell the student and supervisor(s) when 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.