SSoA GUIDELINES FOR CONFIRMATION OF PHD REGISTRATION

“The Confirmation Review is intended to confirm whether or not the student and his/her research project have the potential for successful research at doctoral level.”—UoS Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes.

1. Background
Over the past few years the University has introduced a series of changes to how Postgraduate Research students are enrolled. Before August 2012, students were enrolled on an MPhil to begin with and once they had passed their ‘Upgrade’ (around the end of year 1 of study) their status was changed to PhD. If they started their PhD after August 2012, however, they were enrolled straight onto a PhD.
What hasn’t changed is that students are still required to undergo a formal review—previously ‘Upgrade’ (applicable to students who started before 1 August 2012) and now ‘Confirmation Review’ for students starting after that date. Regardless of date of entry, student status is considered “probationary”, until Upgrade / Confirmation review has been ‘passed’.

2.0 Purpose of Confirmation
The purpose of the confirmation review is to assess the student’s progress and ability to successfully submit and pass their PhD in a reasonable time frame (usually 3 years). In this assessment, the criteria defined below should be applied. The assessment should not be confined to the research material presented by the student but should also consider the student’s demonstrable academic and generic skills demonstrated through their Research Training Report (DDP Portfolio).
Clearly, it is hoped that the experience of doing a mini-viva will be a useful rehearsal for the final viva, and that the discussions during the mini-viva will be helpful for the student’s on-going work.

3. Criteria for Confirmation
3.1. A student should be confirmed if he or she meets the following criteria:
   i. Satisfactory progress in the work so far;
   ii. Ability to formulate a viable hypothesis or research question that could be completed within the normal time frame of the PhD programme (usually 3 years overall, or 6 years pro-rata for PT study);
   iii. Formulation of a viable plan for the work;
   iv. Consideration of the dimensions of the project concerning research ethics and integrity, and formal application for ethics approval from the school’s Research Ethics Committee (or other body such as the NHS) if appropriate;
   v. Satisfactory generic research skills, subject-specific and technical skills development (students funded by government sponsors or other funding bodies, such as the Research Councils, must meet the specific requirements stipulated by those bodies);
   vi. Satisfactory submission of all requested confirmation review documents including the Research Training report (which includes the Training Needs Analysis);
vii. **English Language proficiency**, both written and spoken, appropriate to the PhD topic.

It is expected that the specific components in the student’s confirmation submission, in conjunction with the confirmation mini-viva (see below), will demonstrate that these criteria have been met. In addition to the above criteria, the student must meet any other Departmental or Faculty requirements.

4. **Process of Confirmation**
4.1 **Management and Oversight**
The oversight of the confirmation process is the responsibility of the Director of Doctoral Programmes. The date for the expected confirmation will be established in the initial supervisory / induction meetings, and the invitation to submit documents will be initiated by the Director of Doctoral Programmes normally 2 months prior to the expected submission date. The Director of Doctoral Programmes will also prompt the main supervisor to appoint a second reviewer (normally another academic from within the School of Architecture) who is independent from the project. Together, they will form the confirmation review panel.

4.2 **Time Limits**
SSoA policy is that confirmation will take place 9 months after initial registration for full-time students. UofS Code of Practice states that ‘If a student fails the first attempt, they will be permitted to undertake a second attempt no later than 18 months from the start of their registration. For part-time students these deadlines are pro-rata.’ The period between the first and second attempt should normally be 3 months and should not exceed more than 6 months. It is expected that most students will successfully confirm on the first attempt, but should a student fail his or her 1st attempt, a 2nd attempt will be permitted.

4.3 **Components of Confirmation**
The process of assessment is implemented by means of a confirmation report and mini-viva, outlining the work accomplished so far, and the programme of further work that will lead to a successful thesis. These components will be considered by a confirmation panel.

4.3.1 **The Confirmation Report**
The Confirmation Report should be drafted by the student in consultation with their Supervisor(s). Whilst it is recognised that the exact nature of the report submitted by the student will vary across the research paradigms that are found within SSoA, for students who started after August 2013, it should cover the following components as discrete items (i.e. separate files).

1. **Summary Research Report** (5 A4 pages, ca 1500 - 2000 words) including: an introduction giving the context of the work; a statement of the research question(s) and hypothesis if relevant; a statement concerning methodology & ethics as well as an outline of the thesis structure. As an addendum to the 5 pages, a timetable for completion and full bibliography should be attached.
(2) **Detailed Research Report**, i.e. sample of academic work (max. 7,500 words). This should be a substantial piece of work towards the thesis objectives. It could be for example a critical literature review, single or joint-authored published journal/conferences papers or any other research work which puts the research project into context. These may vary from project to project.  
(3) **Research Training Report** (DDP Portfolio, including updated TNA and critical reflection on research training). Confirmation is contingent on agreed development needs having been achieved, and a clear and credible plan being presented for the succeeding 2/3 years.

4.3.2 Report by Main Supervisor  
A report from the Main Supervisor on the student’s work must be submitted in advance of the confirmation viva to the Panel and the Student. This report should not exceed 1 A4 page (normally between 300 and 500 words).

4.3.3 The mini-Viva  
The purpose of the mini-viva is to ascertain, in conjunction with the student’s submitted confirmation reports and the report from the main supervisor, that the above criteria (see 2.1, above) have been met. The mini-viva should also be an opportunity for the student to discuss and defend his/her ideas.  
The confirmation review panel consists of two reviewers (main supervisor plus one independent reviewer) and will be convened by the main supervisor. If records of supervisor-student meetings have indicated problems, then the Director of Doctoral Programmes might join the panel. The Director of Doctoral Programmes has final jurisdiction over the membership of the Panel and its constitution. If consensus can’t be reached about the outcome of a mini-viva, the Director of Doctoral Programmes should be informed. If necessary, the dispute will be taken to the Director of the Graduate School and the Director of Research to reach a resolution.  
**Mini-vivas** will normally be organised within 2 weeks of submission, attended by the student and the confirmation review panelists. Reviewers are expected to have read the submitted material before the mini-viva, and to have had a short pre-viva meeting. Mini-vivas should last approximately 45 minutes with the student. Immediately following this discussion, the student should be asked to leave the room while the review panel make a decision, and then inform the student. The possible outcomes of the mini-viva are discussed in the following section.  
Once a pass is confirmed, the decision will be reported to the PGR Committee by the Director of Doctoral Programmes who will also forward the formal report (including reviewers feedback & Research Training Report) to the School of Architecture’s PGR Administrator who will then forward it to the University’s Research & Innovation Services for approval by the Faculty.

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1 Please note that jointly-authored work may form part of the Detailed Research Report. Where jointly authored published outputs are submitted, the student should provide a summary about how the journal article fits in with the work conducted for obtainment of the PhD and how research has progressed since submitting the journal article. Further, the student should provide an outline of their contribution to the paper.
5. Outcomes of the mini-viva

5.1 Outcomes

The following are the potential outcomes of the confirmation review process:

1. Immediate confirmation is recommended
   In this case, the paperwork will be prepared outlining a student’s submission of the documents and their successful defence at a mini-viva for Faculty approval. The student will receive the reviewers’ feedback by email. Once approval is confirmed, a student’s record will be updated on the online system (as outlined above).

2. Confirmation is recommended subject to minor amendments
   In case of “Confirmation is recommended subject to minor amendments,” the student will have to make amendments to the originally submitted documents according to the reviewers’ comments. The normal timeframe for the student to carry out the amendments as required by the review panel is 1 month for full-time study, or 2 months for part-time study. The revised confirmation review reports should be submitted to the Director of Doctoral Programmes who will pass them on to the initially appointed review team. The student should address clearly the reviewers’ comments or give justification why recommendations might not have been addressed. The resubmitted documents will be reviewed by the same panel and the review outcome will be one of the following:
   1. Immediate confirmation is recommended
   2. Confirmation is not recommended

   In the above case of “Confirmation is not recommended,” a “Fail” will be the result to conclude the student’s first attempt at confirmation. The student will be allowed to undertake a second attempt normally within 3 months for full-time study (or, 6 months for part-time study). The possible outcomes will be the same as the first attempt. Each student is allowed to have two attempts confirmation. The second attempt will follow the same process as the first attempt.

3. Confirmation is not recommended [Fail, 1st attempt]
   In case of ‘confirmation is not recommended’ being the outcome of the confirmation review, the student is allowed to undertake a 2nd attempt. The 2nd attempt normally has to be submitted within 3 months of full-time study (or, 6 months for part-time study). The second attempt will follow the same process as the first attempt.

In case of two failed attempts, the student will not be able to continue the research towards PhD but will be transferred to an MPhil Programme. A formal examination of the work towards the degree of MPhil may be arranged as soon as possible. It should be made clear that a second failed attempt at confirmation will mean that the student be registered for MPhil status. It is not the role of the
Confirmation Panel to determine, at that stage, if the student’s work is appropriate for submission for the MPhil degree.
It is also not the role of the Confirmation Panel to consider action to de-register students whose work is deemed academically insufficient. Evidence from the upgrade process, however, may be used in subsequent Unsatisfactory Progress proceedings implemented by SSoA to the Faculty.

5.2 Joint Report
A written joint report on the outcome of the mini-viva should be signed by both reviewers of the confirmation review panel and then submitted to the Director of Doctoral Programmes. This report will be forwarded to the student & supervisors. A standard template for this report is provided for this purpose.

5.3 Public Presentation
Following successful confirmation, students will normally be invited to present their work to the Graduate School. This event will be organized by the Director of Doctoral Programmes.

This document consolidates guidance set out on the SSoA website:
http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/architecture/postgraduate/research
& the UofS Code of Practice: see
http://www.shef.ac.uk/ris/pgr/code/cr_guidance
and
http://www.shef.ac.uk/ris/pgr/ddpportal/guidance/assessment

Please read in conjunction with the SSoA PhD Handbook