

Doctoral College Confirmation Guidance for PhD Students and EngD Research Engineers

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Introduction

This guidance document is intended to provide support as you prepare to go through the PhD Confirmation/ EngD mid-term review process. It will cover the common aspects of the process across the University but should be considered alongside any programme-specific information provided to you by your Department, Faculty or School. You may also wish to refer to [QA7 Research Degrees](#) regarding University policy on progression as well as [Regulation 16](#). Please note that if you are on a Professional Doctorate you are not required to undertake Confirmation.

Throughout this document, unless otherwise specified, the term 'Confirmation' is used as a shorthand to represent both the PhD Confirmation examination and the EngD mid-term review examination, which follow broadly similar processes. Similarly, EngD students are required to submit a 'major report' rather than a 'Confirmation report' which is the term used throughout the document.

Appendix 1 provides a process flow chart of the full Confirmation process.

Appendix 2 provides additional information on Faculty/School-specific guidance.

What is Confirmation?

Confirmation is a formal progression point that you must successfully pass in order to continue with your PhD/ EngD studies and have your registration confirmed on the doctoral level programme.

Confirmation timing differs depending upon your programme and mode of study: PhD students will usually undertake Confirmation around twelve months after initial registration (twenty-four months for part-time PhD students and EngD students), whilst the integrated PhD programmes typically delay the examination to twenty-four months after registration. Your individual deadline to submit your Confirmation report and associated documents will be agreed at the start of your studentship as part of Candidature.

The Confirmation examination involves a written submission and an oral defence of the work (a viva voce). Your work will be assessed by two internal examiners to see whether you have reached an appropriate level of understanding in your area of research, are capable of carrying out the research at doctoral level, and whether you are capable of successfully completing the planned project on time before your registration end date. It is designed to be a developmental process, and it can be helpful to obtain feedback from academic staff who are independent from your supervisory team.

Please note that you are only permitted **two** attempts to pass Confirmation ([see Regulation 16](#)). Students who do not pass this examination will be transferred to an MPhil registration, awarded a lower-level exit award, or be withdrawn from study.

Requirements for Confirmation

You are required to submit the following:

1. Confirmation report
2. A data management plan
3. Your section of the Confirmation form (PGR3)

By the time you reach Confirmation you are required to have:

4. Obtained ethical approval for your research project
5. Completed training on, and passed tests in [Academic integrity](#) and [Research integrity](#)
6. Completed the training and development activities identified at Candidature
7. Received a satisfactory progress report from your supervisor

You *may* also be required to

- a) Submit at least one draft chapter of your thesis (HSS Faculty only)
- b) Participate in any Faculty/Department/School-specific activities related to Confirmation

Further details about these requirements can be found in the sections below.

You are expected to ensure all of the requirements for Confirmation listed above are completed. If they are not, your Confirmation examiners may still examine your work and report their findings, but you will not be permitted to progress past this milestone until **all** requirements for Confirmation have been met.

Timing and format of the submission

You are required to submit your Confirmation report and associated documentation by the deadline given at Candidature. Your exact deadline can be viewed in your MyDetails section in [SAMIS](#). Although it may seem a long way off at the start of your studies, plan your work so that you can meet this deadline. Your supervisory team will be able to assist you in generating a workplan and the [doctoral development programme](#) offers workshops in time management, motivation and productivity.

You may wish to submit your Confirmation report and associated documents ahead of your deadline. If this is the case, please notify your supervisor and the [Doctoral College](#) who will be able to accommodate an early submission.

You are required to submit your Confirmation report and data management plan (and any Faculty required documents) electronically through Moodle via the [Doctoral College Submission](#) page. This will be regarded as your primary submission.

Deadline difficulties

Failure to submit a Confirmation report by the deadline will normally be considered a failed first attempt. If you become at all concerned that you will be unable to meet your deadline, you are strongly encouraged to talk to your supervisor or the [Doctoral College](#) as soon as possible, as they are able to provide guidance and support in actively managing the situation. You can also find information on [suspending your studies](#) on the Student Support web pages.

Confirmation report content and format

The format of your Confirmation report will vary, depending on your Department/ Faculty/ School requirements (see also Appendix 2). The Confirmation report should be written in a way that demonstrates your knowledge of the research area. It should evidence research already undertaken, provide information on what further research will be conducted, and confirm how it will be accomplished. You can find guidance in [Appendix 5 of QA7 Research Degrees](#), on points to consider when writing up your report.

The following is a general guide to a typical report structure. You are **strongly advised to discuss this with your supervisor, and to refer to your specific Departmental, Faculty or School guidance (see Appendix 2):**

- Introduction
- Aims and objectives
- Literature review
- Purpose of the research
- Statement of work conducted so far
- Research methodology
- Timetable of planned work up to completion
- Contents page of full thesis with chapter titles. Summaries of each chapter may be required by some departments
- Relevant appendices
- Statement on ethical considerations
- Bibliography/references

Any word limit for your report should also be specified in your Departmental/ Faculty/ School guidance

(see Appendix 2).

Plans for an alternative format thesis

If you already know you want eventually submit your thesis in the [alternative format](#) i.e. including publications as part of the chapter contents, you should discuss the format of your Confirmation report with your supervisor. Consider the further [information on alternative format thesis](#), and follow any Departmental/ Faculty/ School guidance on this point. The format of your Confirmation report does not commit you to a particular format or writing style for your thesis in the future.

Citing References

You will need to ensure that any sources you use in your Confirmation report (including sources of your own work) are cited correctly to avoid the assessment offence of plagiarism. The Library provides guidance on [Citing References](#). Your Confirmation documents will be automatically reviewed by the plagiarism detection service used by the University to identify any similarities between student work and existing sources elsewhere. The University takes academic misconduct very seriously and if there is suspected plagiarism in the Confirmation report, the examination will be delayed until an investigation has been carried out, under the [Procedure For Inquiring Into Allegations Of Misconduct In Research And Scholarship](#).

Data management plan

In line with the requirements stated in the [University's Research Data Policy](#) you are required to develop a data management plan during the early stages of your studies, and this will be checked at Confirmation. You will need to confirm how your research data will be handled during and after your doctorate. You can find guidance about [writing a data management plan](#) as well as a specific [data management plan template](#) to support this activity. Submit the data management plan to Moodle along with your Confirmation report.

Confirmation form (PGR3)

The Confirmation form (PGR3) provides essential information about your Confirmation submission to the Progression Board of Examiners. All PhD students undertaking Confirmation need to complete the form through [SAMIS](#). EngD Research Engineers will receive a copy of the form from their Doctoral Programmes Administrator.

You will receive a reminder email three months before your deadline to start thinking about completing the Confirmation form (PGR3). Although you can start your section of the form at any point once the task becomes available, it is recommended that you only complete and submit the form after you have submitted your report (and associated documents) and once your training record is up-to-date (in line with the requirements set out at Candidature). You are expected to liaise with your supervisor before completing your part of the form.

You can view the questions in advance by going into the task and clicking on each page of the task (however **do not** click on save and submit on the final page until you have actually completed **all** of the questions).

Please note that once you have submitted your task you will be unable to go back and edit your response. Therefore, please take care to review your responses before submitting your task. In the rare instance you need to include further information, please contact your supervisor and/or your Doctoral Programmes Administrator.

Please note that you may lose formatting (such as bullet points) if copying and pasting your answers into the task for PGR3. This can be avoided if you use text (i.e., A. B. C.) to separate points instead.

Progress report from supervisor

Once you have completed your section of PGR3, the form is then sent to your supervisor to provide a

commentary on your progress so far and their opinion of whether the research is on track for an on-time thesis submission.

For those of you that have completed your PGR3 form online, you will be able to view it through [SAMIS](#) by going to the 'PGR Student Details' screen. The information provided in PGR3 is finally passed to the Progression Board of Examiners in advance of your examination.

Ethical Approval

You must have submitted an application to the Ethics@Bath system and, where necessary, obtained appropriate formal ethics committee approval for your project before any data collection begins, or before you reach Confirmation (whichever is the soonest).

For further information see '[Ethics for Doctoral Students](#)', and '[Ethics Review Process](#)'.

General guidance on [research integrity and ethics](#) as well as [carrying out ethically responsible research](#) can be found on the University web pages.

Mandatory training in academic integrity

The [academic integrity training](#) provides all students with a basic knowledge and understanding of good academic practice. You are required to undertake this training and then successfully pass the associated test in order to progress through Confirmation. The test is available through [Moodle](#), please search for 'Academic Integrity' and click in to your Department/ School page. Once you pass the test in Moodle the result will be recorded in your SAMIS record.

Mandatory training in research integrity

You are also required to complete research integrity training to ensure compliance with the UUK Concordat to Support Research Integrity. This training is offered through [Moodle](#), please search for 'Research Integrity Training – Doctoral Students'. Once you pass the test in Moodle the result will be recorded in your SAMIS record.

Training and professional development activity

Your requirements for training/ professional development/ personal development activities will have been specified at Candidature. It is your responsibility to ensure that this activity (or equivalent) is completed in time for Confirmation.

You will not be permitted to pass Confirmation until all the training requirements have been successfully met. You can find out further information about what development opportunities the Doctoral College can offer via [MyDoctoralDevelopment](#).

Progression Board of Examiners

The Progression Board of Examiners will consist of two examiners who are members of academic staff but who are **not** part of your supervision team. In certain circumstances, the Progression Board of Examiners may also include an Independent Chairperson who will not take part in the examination, but who will assist the examiners in ensuring that the examination is fair and conducted in accordance with the University's Regulations.

Your supervisor will be required to start the process for appointing the Progression Board of Examiners approximately three months before your deadline for submitting the Confirmation report (and associated documents).

The Confirmation examination

Your supervisor will be encouraged to organise your Confirmation examination to be held within four weeks of your examiners receiving the report. Once they have done so your supervisor (or the lead

examiner) will contact you to confirm the date, time and location of the examination.

The duration of a Confirmation examination will vary depending on your Department/ Faculty/ School and also depending upon your research area, but an average examination would take between one to two hours to complete. Your examination may take place in an academic's office, or in a suitable room elsewhere. The room must have the correct equipment needed for you – e.g., if you need to conduct a presentation.

Supervisors are not expected to be present during the Confirmation examination and must not become involved in the examination. However, in certain circumstances, they may be permitted to attend, and you can give permission for your supervisor to do so when completing of the PGR3 form.

Your Confirmation examination will consist of a discussion between you and your examiners about your research. In some instances, depending on your discipline, you may also be required to give a short presentation. In some cases, these presentations may be open to other interested students and staff to attend.

Your examiners will then hold a closed meeting to discuss and come to an agreement, after which you will be informed of the provisional outcome of your examination.

For further information on points to consider during your examination, you may wish to access [Appendix 5 of QA7 Research Degrees](#).

Potential outcomes of a Confirmation examination

The Progression Board of Examiners will recommend one of the following outcomes to Board of Studies (Doctoral) for **PhD students**:

- 1) Registration on the PhD can now be confirmed
- 2) Make a second submission at a later date
- 3) Transfer registration to the lower-level degree of MPhil
- 4) Withdraw registration

The Progression Board of Examiners will recommend one of the following outcomes to Board of Studies (Doctoral) for **EngD Research Engineers**:

- 1) Registration on the EngD can now be confirmed
- 2) Make a second submission at a later date
- 3) Award an exit award (Postgraduate Diploma or Degree of Master)
- 4) Withdraw registration

You will be told the examiners recommended outcome at the end of the examination, and they will produce a report about your work and your performance in the exam. The recommended outcome will be provisional until formally ratified by the Board of Studies (Doctoral).

If your first attempt to pass Confirmation has not been successful and you are permitted to make a second attempt (outcome 2, above), the examiners will clarify what is required (i.e. a revised confirmation report, a second oral examination only, or both a revised report and a second oral examination). The examiners will also set a provisional timescale for the re-submission (usually within six months for full-time students/research engineers and within nine months for part-time students).

Examiner feedback

Following your examination, you will be given the opportunity to view the examiners feedback and provide your own comments on the examination process. Confirmation is a developmental process

and even when the examiners are satisfied that your work is satisfactory and your registration can be confirmed to your doctoral programme (outcome 1 above), you will still receive suggestions for further work or training that might be useful to pursue (but completion of these is not a condition of passing the examination).

The examiners' report is then viewed by your Director of Studies before being sent to the Board of Studies (Doctoral) for consideration.

Board of Studies (Doctoral)

Board of Studies (Doctoral) is the University committee responsible for checking the examiners reports and approving their recommended outcome of your Confirmation examination. The Board of Studies (Doctoral) meets approximately every four to six weeks.

Where a second attempt to pass the examination is permitted, the Board will formally agree the exact deadline for re-submission. You will then be formally notified of the outcome by email from both the Secretary of the Board of Studies and Academic Registry shortly after the meeting.

Second submission and examination

Depending on the details specified by the examiners, you will either make a second submission of an amended Confirmation report, attend a second oral examination, or possibly undertake both.

You are required to submit your amended Confirmation report (and any other documents such as the draft chapter, where appropriate) electronically through Moodle via the [Doctoral College Submission](#) page.

You are **not** required to complete another PGR3 form to go with your second submission.

Potential outcomes of a second attempt Confirmation examination

The Progression Board of Examiners will recommend one of the following outcomes to Board of Studies (Doctoral) for **PhD students**:

- 1) Registration on the PhD can now be confirmed
- 2) Transfer registration to the lower-level degree of MPhil
- 3) Withdraw registration

The Progression Board of Examiners will recommend one of the following outcomes to Board of Studies (Doctoral) for **EngD Research Engineers**:

- 1) Registration on the EngD can now be confirmed
- 2) Award an exit award (Postgraduate Diploma or Degree of Master)
- 3) Withdraw registration

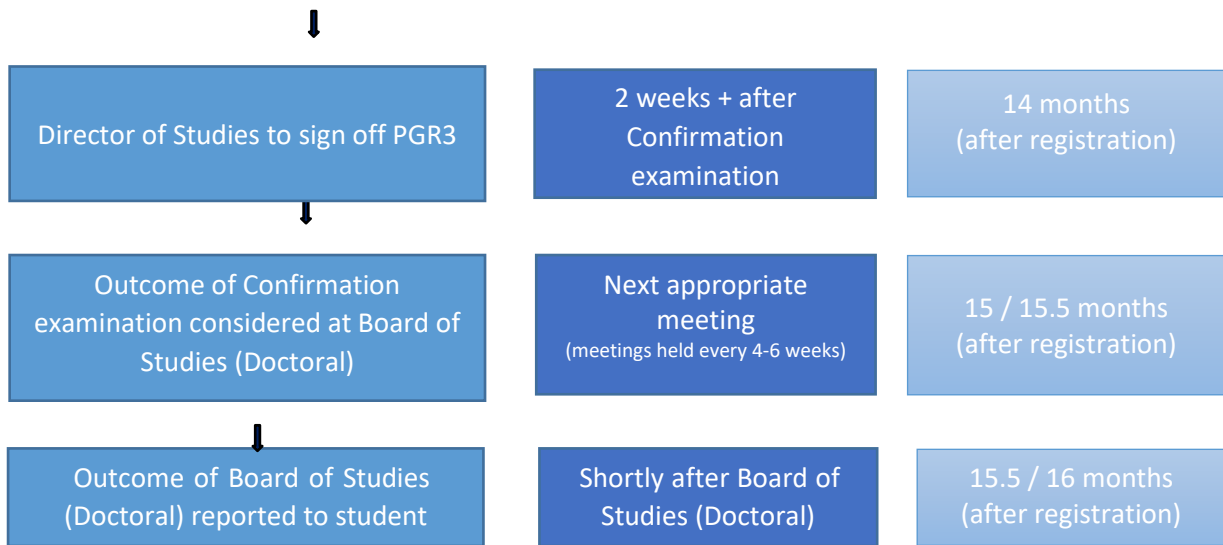
You will be notified of the recommended outcome at the end of the examination. The result will be provisional until considered and formally ratified by the Board of Studies (Doctoral).

Appeals procedure

If you are unhappy with the outcome of your Confirmation examination, [Regulation 17](#) sets out the grounds and procedure for appealing an academic decision made by the Board of Studies, and the timescale for making an appeal. The University provides general guidance about [academic appeals and reviews](#) and the student's union advice and support service can provide independent guidance throughout the academic appeals process.

APPENDIX 1: Confirmation Process Flowchart

ACTIVITY	GENERAL TIMESCALE	EXAMPLE TIMESCALE (Full-time PhD with a 4 year registration)
Complete training / Obtain ethical approval / Produce data management plan / Produce Confirmation report / draft chapter Complete academic / research integrity tests	Between Candidature and deadline for Confirmation	1 - 12 months (after registration)
Supervisor to commence appointment of Progression Board of Examiners	3 to 6 months before deadline for Confirmation	6 - 9 months (after registration)
Student is reminded to start the process for completing their section of PGR3	3 months before deadline for Confirmation	9 months (after registration)
Student submits their Confirmation report / data management plan / ethics approval / draft chapter	By the deadline for Confirmation	12 months (after registration)
Student completes their section of the PGR3 form & Supervisor completes their section of the PGR3 form	By the deadline for Confirmation	12 months (after registration)
Confirmation examination is held	Within 4 weeks of submission	13 months (after registration)
Progression Board of Examiners completes their section of PGR3	2 weeks after Confirmation examination	13.5 months (after registration)
Student provides feedback in PGR3	2 weeks + after Confirmation examination	13.5 months (after registration)



APPENDIX 2: Additional Faculty / School-specific guidance

Please note that some departments may also provide further advice on Confirmation, alongside the Faculty or School -specific information provided below:

Faculty of Engineering and Design

Timing

Confirmation occurs 12 months from date of registration (full-time PhD)

Confirmation Report

Report to be written in the style of a research dissertation

Report to be a maximum 50 pages cover to cover

Structure of the report:

- a) Draft contents of the PhD, with short summaries of what will be covered in the main chapters
- b) Introduction to the subject and essential background to the research
- c) Objectives of the research and why it is important
- d) Literature survey. This will not be as exhaustive as that found in the final PhD but will demonstrate that the student has a deep understanding of the field, that the student is able to source information and refer to it appropriately, that the student can distinguish the important from the unimportant, and that the student has identified gap(s) in present understanding which will form the basis for the present research. (The material presented in the confirmation report can be included in the final thesis and would not constitute plagiarism)
- e) Description of the methods already used, and to be used, in the research
- f) Discussion of any results obtained so far
- g) Clear description of the future directions of the research, including planned activities, expected outcomes, risk mitigation measures, 'what if' scenarios, and a timetable which shows realistic timelines to graduation within the Faculty (full-time) target of 3 years (or 3.5 years if funding is available for this period)
- h) List of references

Submission instructions

Submit to Moodle by the deadline.

Timing

Where a department does not have set/block periods then the confirmation meeting should take place within one month of the submission of papers/report.

Draft Chapter

A draft of one thesis chapter is required. Speak to your supervisor for further information on which draft chapter needs to be provided. QA7 Appendix 6 provides a [Specification of Higher Degree theses and portfolios](#).

Confirmation Report

Report to be a maximum of 5,000 words (excluding references and appendices).

Structure of the report:

- a) Abstract (200 words)
- b) Context/background literature
- c) Aims, objectives/research question(s)
- d) Main research methods and rationale for these
- e) Likely contribution to knowledge
- f) Record of work completed and written progress to date and outline of remaining work to be completed
- g) Contents page of full thesis (containing titles of chapters). Chapter summaries are not necessary at this stage but can be included if students wish
- h) Detailed timetable for completion
- i) Any issues relating to ethics not covered by the signed ethics forms

Suggested format of cover page of the report:

- a) University of Bath logo
- b) Department logo
- c) Student name
- d) Student number
- e) Title
- f) Date
- g) Name of supervisors

Ethics

Ethical forms need to be signed off prior to any data collection.

Viva voce oral examination

The oral examination (comprising a brief presentation by the student followed by questions and discussion) may or may not (depending on departmental practice) be open to other interested students and staff to attend.

HSS would strongly recommend that the Lead Supervisor attend (but cannot participate). However, this is subject to permission by the candidate.

Where a department uses an open session, HSS recognises that occasionally an external academic may also attend. However they would not play a part in the formal examination of the student.

HSS would expect that the Progression Board of Examiners would hold a closed meeting immediately after the oral examination to decide on the outcome. Where the presentation has been open to others, the Progression Board of Examiners may decide to hold closed discussions with the candidate at this stage if they wish.

SWDTC students

In the case of a student on a Collaborative/Interdisciplinary SWDTC programme, it is good practice if the second examiner (i.e. not the Chair or Examiner One of the Progression Board of Examiners) is from either the University of Bristol or the University of Exeter (defined by the location of their Second Supervisor), where possible.

Timing

For the following programmes, Confirmation occurs at:

Department	Programme	Confirmation report due
	Standard PhD	12 months FT / 24 months PT
	Standard Integrated PhD	24 months (12 months after start of PhD)
	NERC GW4+	12 months
	SWBio	18 months
	WISE	24 months
Chemistry	Catalysis	12 months from registration at Bath
	CMAC	12 months
	Sustainable Chemical Technologies	24 months (12 months after start of PhD)
Computer Science	EngD	24 months
Mathematical Sciences	Doctoral College PhD	18 months
	Integrated PhD	30 months (18 months after start of PhD)
	SAMBa Integrated PhD	30 months (18 months after start of PhD)
Physics	Condensed Matter Physics	12 months from registration at Bath
	Photovoltaics	18 months

Part-time students/research engineers have 50% extra time added to the standard full-time deadlines listed above (e.g. 24 months instead of 12 for a standard PhD).

Examination criteria

The student/research engineer should demonstrate: knowledge of their research area; evidence of conducting research, including (if appropriate) the generation and analysis of novel results, data or other outputs; and a realistic future perspective.

Confirmation Report

The student/research engineer's report should document these aspects in detail and should be written in a professional style; appropriately formatted; largely devoid of typographical and other minor errors; and should include a correctly formatted bibliography.

Viva voce oral examination

The viva should entail probing questioning of the candidate by the examiners and may include an oral presentation by the student/research engineer, depending on discipline.

School of Management

Timing

- 12 months from date of registration for full-time PhD students
- 24 months from date of registration for part-time PhD students
- By June of the second year for ESRC students
- By October of the second year for Integrated PhD students

Structure of the report:

- a) Abstract
- b) Aims, objectives/research question
- c) Main research methods and rationale for these
- d) Likely contribution to knowledge
- e) Clear description of planned activities, expected outcomes
- f) Bibliography/references
- g) Literature review
- h) The report should be between 10,000-20,000 words

Viva voce oral examination

The Confirmation meeting should be approached as a viva voce examination and, in some ways, as a fore-runner of the PhD viva: Questions are likely to be tough and testing and so students should be well-prepared to discuss any aspect of their work. However, the Confirmation meeting is also a positive and constructive opportunity to discuss key aspects of their research, its main strengths and weaknesses, and how best to progress in the later stages of the PhD. Material prepared for confirmation is not necessarily finished, and panel members know this. Students are expected to be able to defend their work, but also be able to recognise difficulties or problems (no research is perfect), and to take on board assessors' comments and recommendations.

Preparing for the examination

The lead examiner is responsible for the organisation of the examination in consultation with the supervisors and candidate.

It is strongly advised that examiners meet before the examination to discuss all relevant issues.

The examination will include an opportunity for the panel to pose questions for the candidate to answer. The questions will be decided amongst the panel in advance to ensure that key areas are covered. This may be achieved in a pre-confirmation meeting, prior to the student (and any non-panel participants) joining them.

Candidates should prepare a formal or informal presentation (10 minutes). Handouts and visual audio-visual aids may be used but are not obligatory.

The viva voce oral examination

The student will provide a verbal overview of their PhD for about 10 minutes after which the examiners will ask questions and otherwise explore the Confirmation report.

The panel will ask questions about the work, and the confirmation meeting is expected to last from 60-90 minutes.

The candidate should demonstrate knowledge of their research area, evidence of conducting research and provide a clear description of planned activities and expected outcomes.

The examiners decision will be based on the criteria outlined above and will take into account the written material provided and the discussion at the meeting.

The outcome decision should reflect adequate progress, clear research questions, situated within a body of knowledge and a conceptual framework, viable and ethical methodology, and evidence that required data is available or can feasibly be collected within the stipulated time period, appropriate level of writing skills, an argument, and a credible plan for completion - the ingredients of a viable thesis, in other words.

The Director of Studies (DoS).

Candidates may approach their DoS at any time (before or after) the confirmation meeting if they have any concerns regarding the confirmation process.