Show Cause for Research Candidates Guideline

Version	Approved by	Approval date	Effective date	Next full review
2.0	Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research	2 September 2020	2 September 2020	September 2023

Guideline Statement		
Purpose	To provide clear guidelines on the Show Cause process for higher degree research (HDR) candidates.	
Scope	This guideline should be used by HDR candidates, and academic and professional staff managing HDR candidates.	
Are Local Documents on this subject permitted?	☐ Yes; however Local Documents must be consistent with this University-wide Document	☒ No
Guideline		

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1. Introduction

A request to Show Cause is recognition that a higher degree research (HDR) candidate has reached a point where the University considers, after completing the required research progress reviews, they are unlikely to complete their degree.

The Show Cause request provides a final opportunity for the candidate to demonstrate to the University that they have a detailed, feasible and supported plan to complete their research degree. It should be viewed as an opportunity to pause and reflect on how a candidature can be refocused and provide a pathway to completion.

Candidates are requested to Show Cause in a letter from the Dean of Graduate Research. The candidate is asked to provide a formal written response which is assessed by the relevant Faculty Higher Degree Committee (the 'Committee').

The Committee then makes a recommendation to the Dean of Graduate Research as to whether the candidature should be discontinued, or whether the candidate should be given an opportunity to complete their candidature under strict conditions.

The Dean of Graduate Research makes the final decision regarding the outcome of the case.

2. Show Cause Request Process (see Appendix A)

The four pathways that result in a candidate being asked to Show Cause are a consequence of the following:

- unsatisfactory progress;
- lapsed candidature;
- non-attendance at a research progress review; or
- failure to successfully complete confirmation

In each situation, the Committee considers the case to determine whether to make a recommendation to the Dean of Graduate Research that the candidate be formally asked to Show Cause.

2.1. Postgraduate Coordinator Recommendation

The Postgraduate Co-ordinator (PGC) submits to the Committee a Show Cause recommendation based on a reason listed in Section 2. This includes all documentation relating to the research progress within the candidature.

As a minimum, this should include documentation of prior research progress reviews and related actions clearly outlining the following:

a) Remedial actions required, milestones set and a clear statement of the dates by which the candidate was expected to achieve these;

b) Candidate's progress against the remedial milestones set in prior reviews;

c) Candidate's awareness of the reasons and actions as outlined above in (a) and (b); and

d) Panel's reasons for recommending Show Cause.

Where the candidate has documented that they have experienced issues affecting their candidature as part of the Progress Review process, it is important that the School demonstrates how they have addressed these issues with the candidate.

2.2. Higher Degree Committee Recommendation

The primary basis for the Committee's recommendation is assessment of academic progress of the candidate; however it may also include consideration of whether the School has been procedurally fair to the candidate in their assessment of progress.

After considering all documentation, the Committee will either:

a) support the Show Cause recommendation, and refer the recommendation to the Dean of Graduate Research (see Section 2.3); or

b) not support the recommendation, in which case they must propose to the Dean of Graduate Research the conditions that will be placed on the candidature. This should include an additional review against new milestones or completion of the thesis by a specific date.

2.3. Request to Show Cause from the Dean of Graduate Research

The Dean of Graduate Research will determine if the process leading to the Show Cause recommendation has been procedurally fair.

If the recommendation of the Committee is accepted, the Dean of Graduate Research will notify the candidate in a letter that they are required to Show Cause why their candidature should not be discontinued. The letter will include the reasons noted by the Committee.

The Show Cause letter will be sent via email to the candidate's UNSW email address. It is the responsibility of the candidate to ensure that this email address is regularly checked.

The letter normally presents two options for the candidate to consider, which are either to respond to the Show Cause request within 20 working days, or to withdraw without prejudice from the research degree. If submission of the thesis is possible in the time-frame, then the candidate can do so. In such cases a response to Show Cause is not required.

If the Dean of Graduate Research does not support the recommendation, or concludes that the School and Faculty have not been procedurally fair to the candidate in their assessment of progress, new conditions will be placed on the candidature. These may include an additional review against new milestones or completion of the thesis by a specific date. The candidate will be formally notified of these conditions.

3. Matters the candidate should consider in preparing their response to Show Cause

It is critical that a candidate who receives a Show Cause letter considers the serious nature of the request and the potential for their candidature to be discontinued. Discontinuation of candidature results in exclusion of the candidate from the university and could preclude readmission.

Candidates are strongly advised to seek independent advice on their response and proposed course of action. The ARC student representative organisation provides advocacy services that can advise on the preparation of the formal response.

The Show Cause process is meant to be an opportunity for candidates to pause and reflect on what they can do to refocus their candidature. However, it is acknowledged that the process can also be stressful. Candidates are encouraged to seek support from the ARC student council and UNSW counselling services if required.

3.1. Withdrawal from candidature without prejudice

Responding to the Show Cause letter is the final opportunity for candidates to make a case as to why they should be allowed to continue their research. It is important to consider that once the recommendation is made to the Dean by the Committee, the candidate is no longer permitted to withdraw from the degree without prejudice.

Candidates should be aware if there is:

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a) no new information provided to the Committee in their formal response; or

b) no evidence of a breach in appropriate procedure by the School; and

c) not a clear plan for how they will be able to achieve progress in their work.

In such cases, it is most likely that the candidature will be discontinued. In these situations, withdrawal from the program prior to submission of the formal response is recommended.

4. Candidate's Response to a Show Cause Request

If the candidate decides to respond to the Show Cause request, they must do so in writing to the Dean of Graduate Research within 20 working days of receipt of the letter. If the candidate fails to respond by the due date, the candidature will be discontinued and the candidate will be advised in writing by the Graduate Research School.

A candidate must consider the following key questions when preparing their response to a Show Cause request:

a. Have all issues that have impeded progress been declared as part of the Progress Review process? If not, they should be disclosed and an explanation for why the issues have impeded progress should be provided.

b. Is there a genuine reason to believe that previous barriers to progress are no longer valid?

c. Have all issues raised in the progress reviews been dealt with appropriately by the School or Faculty to mitigate these circumstances?

d. Is there a reasonable plan to get the candidature on track and allow the candidate to make satisfactory progress?

The formal response must:

- systematically address the points raised in the Show Cause letter;
- provide any documentation requested (such as evidence of progress since the last review);
- provide documentation and supporting evidence for their case, which may relate to personal, technical, academic or other matters;
- detail how the barriers to satisfactory progress that they may have been experiencing have been overcome; and
- demonstrate their capacity to complete their research degree in a timely fashion by presenting a clear and compelling plan with timelines.

The candidate may raise any additional issues which they believe have not been adequately covered within the Research Progress Review process.

The candidate’s response will be referred to the Committee for their consideration.

5. Consideration of the Response to Show Cause by the Higher Degree Committee

The Committee will consider the candidate’s response to the Show Cause letter, along with any supporting documentation provided. The PGC will also be asked to provide a recommendation for consideration by the Committee. The Committee will assess whether the following have been addressed:

a) Candidate has satisfactorily addressed all of the concerns raised in the Show Cause letter by addressing the issues and providing a clear, compelling plan for completion; and/or

b) Candidate’s response raises sufficient new mitigating information that would justify their lack of progress; and/or

c) Points raised by the candidate have been considered and appropriately addressed in the Research Progress Review process, in which case the matters cannot be considered new information and will not be considered.

Based on the outcomes from these considerations, there are two possible recommendations from the Committee:

Satisfactory Response. If the Committee is satisfied with the material presented by the candidate in response to a Show Cause request, the candidature will be permitted to continue under specific conditions. These will include clear milestones that will be agreed in collaboration with the candidate and supervisors. The timeframe for achievement of these milestones will typically be one term if full time, and two terms if part time.

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The candidate will be advised by the Dean of Graduate Research in writing of the decision and the conditions that must be met. At the end of the time period a Progress Review will be held. If the milestones are achieved, the candidature will be allowed to continue.

If the candidate fails to meet the agreed milestones at this review, then the candidature will be discontinued.

Unsatisfactory Response. If the Committee is not satisfied with the material presented by the candidate in response to the Show Cause request, then they will make a recommendation to the Dean of Graduate Research that the candidature be discontinued.

6. Meeting with the Dean of Graduate Research

Following the recommendation to discontinue candidature, the candidate will be invited to attend a meeting with the Dean of Graduate Research or delegate to discuss the outcome, and ongoing consequences of the decision. This is also a final opportunity for the candidate to discuss any outstanding matters they feel have not been addressed.

The Dean of Graduate Research will make the final decision as to whether to discontinue the candidature, and the candidate will be formally notified of this decision.

7. Appeals

Candidates have the opportunity to appeal the outcome on the basis of procedural fairness, and this process is outlined in the *Student Complaint Procedure*.

Accountabilities	
Responsible Officer	Dean of Graduate Research
Contact Officer	Director, Graduate Research School
Supporting Information	
Legislative Compliance	This Guideline supports the University's compliance with the following legislation: Nil
Parent Document (Policy and Procedure)	Research Progress Review and Confirmation of Research Candidatures Procedure
Supporting Documents	Nil
Related Documents	Conditions for Award of Doctor of Philosophy Policy Conditions for Award of Master of Philosophy Policy Variation of Candidature Procedure Admission to Higher Degree Research Programs Procedure Higher Degree Research Supervision Policy Higher Degree Research Supervision Procedure Student Complaint Procedure
Superseded Documents	Show Cause for Research Candidates Guideline, v1.0
File Number	2017/22802
Definitions and Acronyms	
HDR	Higher degree research
PGC	Postgraduate Co-ordinator

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Revision History				
Version	**Approved by**	**Approval date**	**Effective date**	**Sections modified**
1.0	Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research	9 October 2017	9 October 2017	This is a new Guideline
2.0	Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research	2 September 2020	2 September 2020	Full Review

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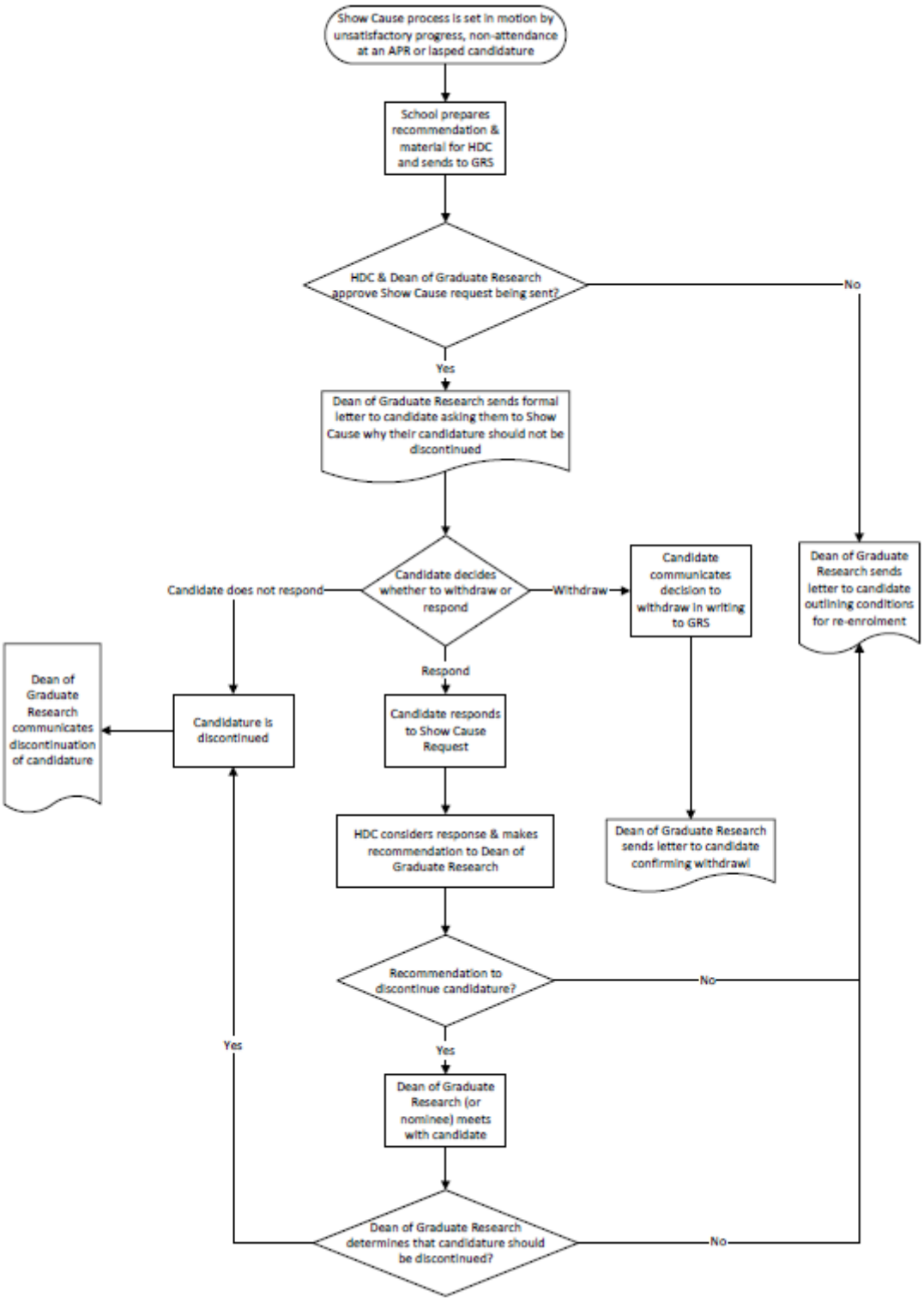
Appendix A: Show Cause Process