**HOW TO CHANGE YOUR PROJECT**

**by Simon Moss**

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| **Introduction** |

Often, research candidates like to change their project during their candidature. For example

* they might want to utilize another method to collect their data
* they might want to shift their project from quantitative to qualitative
* they might want to change the research question they would like to pursue, and so forth

How should candidates manage these changes? What are the potential complications or likely benefits of these changes? What forms and procedures do you need to observe? This document is designed to resolve these questions.

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| **Establish whether your project is restricted** |

Usually, changes to your project are simple to arrange. However, in some instances, the changes need to be reviewed carefully. For example, changes need to be reviewed carefully if

* you are a citizen of a nation in which the UN or Australia has imposed sanctions or restrictions
* your project may be restricted by the Defense Trade Controls Act 2012

Therefore, you should determine whether you are a citizen of a nation in which the UN or Australia has imposed sanctions or restrictions. These nations are listed here

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| Central African Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Guinea-Bissau, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, North Korea, Russia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, Yemen, or Zimbabwe |

In addition, you should utilise the following principle to determine whether your project may be restricted by the Defense Trade Controls Act 2012.

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| Your project may be restricted if you are collaborating with individuals or organizations outside Australia and your research revolves around   * the development or production of military systems, such as nuclear weapons * materials processing * electronics and computers * telecommunications and information security * sensors and lasers * marine, navigation, avionics, aerospace and propulsion * materials, nuclear materials, chemicals, micro-organisms, and toxins |

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| **Determine the magnitude of this change** |

Besides sanctions and defence controls, how you should manage these changes also depends on the magnitude of these amendments. To gauge the magnitude of these amendments, complete the following survey about the changes you plan to introduce. Specifically, whenever you answer yes to the following questions, the ticks refer to the sections in this document you should read. Importantly, if you are a citizen of a sanctioned country—and your project is restricted by the Defence Trade Controls

* consider all changes you have introduced since enrolment
* the red squares are relevant to you as well

Otherwise, consider only the changes you have introduced since confirmation of candidature and disregard the read squares.

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|  | Section to read if the answer is Yes | | | | | |
|  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| **Underlying philosophy** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| I changed the main theoretical perspectives or theories that underpinned this research |  |  |  | ✓ |  |  |
| I had planned to collect only qualitative data but will now collect quantitative data as well or instead | ✓ |  | ✓ |  |  | ✓ |
| I had planned to collect only quantitative data but will now collect qualitative data as well or instead | ✓ |  | ✓ |  |  | ✓ |
| **Changes to the topics or variables** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| I have replaced the central topic, theme, or concept with an alternative | ✓ |  | ✓ |  | ✓ | ✓ |
| I have replaced the key outcome variable with an alternative | ✓ |  | ✓ |  | ✓ | ✓ |
| I have introduced a key independent variable, predictor, or moderator into the design |  | ✓ |  |  |  | ✓ |
| I have introduced a peripheral variable, such as a control variable |  | ✓ |  |  |  |  |
| I want to change the FOE, or field of education, code that was assigned to my project |  |  |  |  | ✓ |  |
| **Changes to the methods** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| I have the changed the population from which I want to collect data |  | ✓ |  |  |  |  |
| I have changed the approach I will adopt to recruit participants or to collect specimens |  | ✓ |  |  |  | ✓ |
| I have changed the methodology—from grounded theory to ethnography or vice versa, for example |  |  |  | ✓ | ✓ |  |
| I have changed which methods I will use to analyse data |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| I have changed which methods I will use to collect data |  | ✓ |  |  |  | ✓ |
| I have changed how I will use a method to collect data; for example, I might continue to use a survey but have chosen different questions |  | ✓ |  |  |  | ✓ |
| **Other changes** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| I have changed the title of my thesis |  |  |  |  |  | ✓ |
| My research is appreciably either more extensive or less extensive than before—such as a reduction from three studies to two studies | ✓ |  |  |  |  |  |

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| 1. **A review of your research** |

Occasionally, such as if your research question has changed fundamentally, you should complete an interim review. This review should resemble a confirmation of candidature—besides the differences that appear in the following table.

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| Departure from the confirmation of candidature | Details |
| You can write a shorter research proposal | * The research proposal could start with a summary of the original plan * The research proposal could then primarily revolve around the changes you plan to introduce and the reasons you plan to introduce these changes * The research proposal could also include updates to the timelines, budget, and ethical implications |
| The proposal can be written informally | * You could write the proposal in bullet points, for example * That is, although the proposal should be comprehendible, your writing will not be judged |
| The presentation can be informal too | * Like the confirmation of candidature, the panel should include three relevant academics, with a maximum of one supervisor * However, the presentation could proceed more like a discussion than a formal speech |
| The panel will evaluate only a subset of criteria | That is, the panel will primarily judge whether   * the supervision panel is still appropriate despite these changes * the project is feasible and valid * the scope of this project is neither too extensive nor too limited |
| After the project is approved, the supervisor can merely email ORI | * Rather than complete a form, the principal supervisor could email [research.degrees@cdu.edu.au](mailto:research.degrees@cdu.edu.au) * The email could indicate the change has been reviewed and approved * The other members of this panel should be copied into this email |

These reviews are helpful, and perhaps necessary, partly because

* you might need to submit another ethics application
* the ethics committee will not accept projects that have not been reviewed
* the changes might elicit complications that your supervisors might have overlooked.

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| **2 Variations to ethics** |

Often, candidates want to change their research substantially while maintaining the main rationale or question. For example, candidates might want to add some additional variables or concepts or might want to modify the methods but not the design. Typically, in these circumstances, you would need to email [ethics@cdu.edu.au](mailto:ethics@cdu.edu.au). Then, in the email, you would

* specify the project number, title of this project, and investigators
* indicate the changes you want to introduce
* present a rationale to justify these changes

In response, the ethics committee might approve these changes. Alternatively, the ethics committee might decide these changes invalidate the previous approval. You would thus be invited to complete another ethics application instead.

**Circumstances in which variations are unnecessary**

Occasionally, even after you change your project, you might not have to inform the ethics committee. That is, the changes you plan to introduce may be congruent or compatible with the original application. To illustrate

* in the original application, you might have indicated that you will assess the workload of participants but did not specify which questions you would include to measure workload
* because you did not specify which questions you would include to measure workload, you would not need to inform the ethics committee of changes to these questions.

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| **3 Full ethics applications** |

If you change the underlying research question, the original ethics application is no longer valid. Consequently, you will need to submit another ethics application. This procedure might seem cumbersome. But, in practice

* you can often utilise many of your answers to the previous application
* that is, you are permitted to plagiarize sentences from other applications; your answers to an ethics application are not assumed to be entirely original

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| **4 Justify these changes to examiners** |

Some changes in your thesis—such as shifts in the theoretical perspectives or theories that underpin your research—may confuse the examiner. For example

* you might initially apply the theory of pragmatism to justify your research and Study 1
* later, you might instead apply critical theory to justify Study 2

As a consequence, your thesis might seem more disjointed than usual. Under these circumstances, in one of your chapters, you may want to include one or more caveats to justify this change, such as

* “During COVID-19, I realized that a more important research question might revolve around the effects of this virus on community resilience. Therefore, I amended the aim of this study to explore…”

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| **5 Change of FOE or field of education code** |

During enrolment, either you or your principal supervisor identified the FOE, or field of education, code that corresponds to your project. [This website](https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/6E04E37B83201BCFCA256AAF001FCA5D?opendocument) stipulates these codes. This code affects the funding you will be allocated, as well as the funding the university receives after you complete your thesis, and therefore needs to be specified accurately. Although uncommon, you, your supervisor, or your college might want to change the code because

* you have changed the central theme, outcome, or methodology of your research
* the code you had originally specified was incorrect

In these circumstances, you need to email [research.degrees@cdu.edu.au](mailto:research.degrees@cdu.edu.au). In this email

* the subject of this email should be “Change of FOE code”
* indicate the code you had originally selected and the code you would like to select
* include a justification of this code, usually comprising three or more sentences; in particular, indicate which aims or methods of this project correspond to the code you would like to select
* include an abstract or summary of your project, usually comprising about 200 words

**Response to this request**

In response to this request, an extra-ordinary committee of three or more staff members will convene to approve or reject this change. Specifically

* the committee will comprise the Deputy Vice Chancellor of Research and Innovation, the Director of Research, and the Dean of Graduate Studies—or suitable delegates
* the committee will attempt to select a suitable FOE code before they are informed of the proposed FOE code.
* if the code the committee selects diverges from the code the candidate proposes, this discrepancy will be discussed with representatives of the relevant College or School, and the arguments will be recorded
* if necessary, the committee could also seek the advice of other individuals with expertise in research that corresponds to the relevant FOE codes
* the HDR manager, or a delegate, will then inform the candidate of whether the request has been approved and will maintain a record of this meeting

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| **6 Contact ORI** |

In some instances, you need to contact ORI at [research.degrees@cdu.edu.au](mailto:research.degrees@cdu.edu.au) and simply outline the changes you would like to introduce to your project. In particular, you need to contact ORI if

* you want to change your title substantially—primarily to update our files
* these changes might breach sanctions or defense control measures.

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| **Appendix A: Sanctions** |

**What are sanctions?**

Occasionally, nations impose restrictions on other regimes, usually to change the behaviour of these regimes. These regimes may include entire nations, such as North Korea, or specific entities, such as a terrorist cell. These restrictions are called sanctions. Some of these sanctions have been imposed by the United Nations Security Council. Other sanctions have been imposed by the Australian government and are called autonomous sanctions. The precise sanctions vary across regimes but often include

* restrictions in the trade of goods, services, and commercial activities
* financial restrictions, such as asset freezes
* travel bans

More information is available at <https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/sanctions-regimes>. This webpage specifies the precise restrictions that Australia imposes on each nation.

**What are the implications of these sanctions to researchers?**

Because of these sanctions, individuals who are citizens of sanctioned nations may not be able to complete particular research projects. For example, research projects that could be utilized by the military are often prohibited. To guarantee your research project does not breach these laws and regulations

* CDU may need to engage the Australian Sanctions Office to review your research
* CDU may request permits from the Australian Sanctions Office, enabling you to conduct research that might otherwise have been prohibited.

Violations of these sanctions can attract severe penalties. Consequently, if you change your research, this advice or these permits may no longer be valid. Therefore, CDU may need to engage the Australian Sanctions Office again.

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| **Appendix B: Defence controls** |

As the previous Appendix demonstrated, sanctions may restrict the research and activities of candidates who are residents of sanctioned nations. In contrast, the Defence Trade Controls Act restricts the research and activities of candidates who collaborate with people who live outside Australia. In particular, if you collaborate with people who live outside Australia, your research might be restricted whenever

* the research is related to items that have been designed or modified to be used by the military for combat
* the research is related to items that could potentially be used by the military, called dual-use items

Dual use items include technologies in the fields of

* materials processing
* electronics and computers
* telecommunications and information security
* sensors and lasers
* marine, navigation, avionics, aerospace and propulsion
* materials, nuclear materials, chemicals, micro-organisms, and toxins

**How to determine whether your research could be restricted by this Act**

In some fields, the research is obviously unrelated to military combat and thus unrelated to this Act, such as studies that revolve around treatments of colds or methods to teach mathematics. In other fields, whether the research could be restricted by this Act is uncertain. In these instances, you may contact [research.degrees@cdu.edu.au](mailto:research.degrees@cdu.edu.au) to seek advice or assess the project yourself by visiting <https://dsgl.defence.gov.au/Pages/Questionnaire.aspx>

**Exemptions**

Sometimes, you want to conduct research that is prohibited by the Defence Trade Controls Act. In these circumstances, you could pursue two avenues to circumvent these prohibitions: exemptions and permits. The following table outlines these avenues.

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| Avenue to circumvent  Defence Trade Controls | Details |
| Exemptions | Your research might be exempted from this Act if   * the technology is already publicly available—such as if your research is designed to evaluate software that everyone can already access * this technology is relevant only to basic science and is not related to a practical objective * this technology is utilized to seek a patent |
| Permits | You can, in principle, apply to a permit to conduct this research |