

Higher Degree Research Policy

Purpose

UNSW will provide Higher Degree Research (HDR) programs that deliver high-quality outcomes, a positive candidate experience, a timely completion, and the development of a high-quality researcher.

This policy states the principles and objectives governing HDR at UNSW.

Scope

The *Higher Degree Research Policy* applies to HDR candidates, supervisors, school and faculty staff, and all other staff members engaged with HDR candidates and programs at UNSW.

Principles and Objectives

1. Higher Degree Research

- 1.1. HDR programs develop candidates as independent researchers capable of producing original research. HDR program learning outcomes align with research and academic excellence, societal impact, and global engagement. This prepares HDR candidates to become research leaders who are globally focused and socially engaged.
- 1.2. HDR candidates are selected on principles of merit, equity and transparency. Selections consider the applicant's ability to carry out the proposed research, and the availability of suitable supervision, facilities and resources.
- 1.3. UNSW offers a suite of HDR scholarships, which are awarded in line with the Australian Government Research Training Program (RTP) scheme and UNSW's goals for research excellence, research capacity, and equity and diversity. They are awarded competitively in a way that is transparent, equitable and fair.
- 1.4. UNSW will make reasonable adjustments where appropriate to enable candidates to participate fully in their studies, in line with [legislative requirements](#).
- 1.5. Candidates are supervised by high-quality supervisory teams who are trained and registered to UNSW standards. Supervisory teams foster a safe, inclusive, respectful and scholarly research environment that supports candidate success. Supervisors are proactively engaged in forming a positive professional relationship with candidates based on mutual respect and trust.
- 1.6. Candidates are enrolled in an approved school/unit within a faculty. They are based at a UNSW campus or approved location where they have access to the supervision, resources, facilities and research community required to complete their research.
- 1.7. Candidates are supported to complete their program within standard course timeframes. Ongoing monitoring and feedback by supervisors and regular Research Progress Reviews assess the candidate's progress against agreed milestones.
- 1.8. HDR examinations are conducted in a fair, transparent and independent manner, and are based on merit.
- 1.9. UNSW promotes a strong research training culture and environment based on an intellectual and

collegiate research community. Candidates and supervisors must meet the standards of research integrity and ethical behaviour outlined in the following:

- [Code of Conduct and Values](#)
- [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](#)
- [Universities Australia Principles for Respectful Supervisory Relationships](#)
- [National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence](#).

- 1.10. Any actual, perceived or potential conflict of interest is disclosed and managed in line with the [Code of Conduct and Values](#) and the [Disclosure Policy](#).
- 1.11. UNSW provides a fair complaints and appeals process if any concerns or issues arise during candidature. They are managed in line with the *Complaints Management and Investigations Policy and Procedure* (see [student complaints](#)).
- 1.12. Instructions that support the *Higher Degree Research Policy* are determined by the Dean of Graduate Research in line with the [Delegations Policy](#): Schedule 9.3 . The Dean of Graduate Research refers to the University Higher Degree Research Committee (UHDC) for consultation and endorsement of these instructions. All HDR instructions can be located on the UNSW HDR SharePoint site, the [HDR Hub](#).

2. Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibilities
Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research & Enterprise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversee the strategic direction in research and enterprise. • Under the UNSW Delegations (schedule 1.3 and 1.4), determines HDR scholarship terms and conditions and awards. • Determines if breaches of the Code of Conduct and Values have occurred.
Pro Vice-Chancellor Research Training & Dean of Graduate Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide leadership and strategic direction for research training and HDR policy. • Oversees all HDR candidatures at UNSW. • Responsible for HDR admission and scholarships, enrolment, candidature management, supervision arrangements and examinations. • Works with Faculties to deliver high-quality HDR programs.
Associate Dean Research Training (ADRT) or equivalent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversee the delivery of high-quality HDR programs for candidates within their faculty • Works with Schools to ensure appropriate resources and facilities are available.
Faculty Higher Degree Committee (HDC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make recommendations to the Dean of Graduate Research on admissions, candidatures, thesis examinations and award of the degree.
Head of School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver HDR programs and initiatives in their school.
Postgraduate Coordinator (PGC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make academic, administrative and resource recommendations for HDR candidates, on behalf of the Head of School. • Monitor and support candidate progress.
Supervisor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guide and support candidates through all stages of their candidature. • Ensure quality outcomes, a positive candidate experience, timely completion and the development of high-quality research graduates.
Candidate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and comply with UNSW codes, policies, and relevant legislation, with the understanding that the University reserves the right to make alterations to any code or policy without notice. • Meet expectations outlined on the HDR Hub to ensure the responsible conduct of research and timely completion.



Higher Degree Research Conditions for Award Procedure

1. Higher Degree Research program conditions

- 1.1. HDR candidates must meet the conditions for award for their program (see Table 1). Candidates enrolled in a joint degree may need to meet additional or different conditions. These are outlined in the joint degree agreement.
- 1.2. Candidates must meet the enrolment and progression requirements outlined in the *Higher Degree Research Policy* and related procedures and instructions.
- 1.3. Candidates will produce a piece of research that meets the conditions in Table 1. They will be examined against the criteria detailed in the *Higher Degree Research Examination Procedure*.
- 1.4. The research must be completed during the candidate’s enrolment.
- 1.5. The research must be the candidate's own research. All research performed with other persons must be acknowledged and include a statement of the candidate's contribution.
- 1.6. Any editorial help or use of AI tools in thesis preparation must be acknowledged. Candidates should consult the guidelines on academic editing ([IPEd guidelines for editing academic theses](#)) and UNSW’s position on the [use of AI and Large Language Models](#).
- 1.7. Candidates must display ethical behaviour and carry out their research with research integrity (see [principle 1.9](#)).

Table 1 HDR Conditions for Award

HDR Program	Conditions for Award	Coursework Requirements
Doctor of Philosophy	The Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) may be awarded to a candidate who completes a piece of research that demonstrates a significant and original contribution to knowledge in their field of study.	Inclusion of any coursework within the PhD must comply with the Australian Qualifications Framework for research degrees and be approved by the Faculty HDC.
Professional Doctorate	The Professional Doctorate (Prof Doc) combines doctoral research and coursework components with professional practice. It may be awarded to a candidate who completes a structured program of coursework and research that demonstrates a significant and original contribution to a field of professional practice.	Complete specified coursework at a level and within a time period set by the Faculty HDC. All coursework must comply with the Level 10 qualification requirements under the Australian Qualifications Framework .
Master by Research	The Master by Research (MRes) may be awarded to a candidate who completes a piece of research that demonstrates an original contribution	Inclusion of any coursework within the MRes must comply with the Australian Qualifications Framework for research degrees and be approved by the

HDR Program	Conditions for Award	Coursework Requirements
	to knowledge in their field of study.	Faculty HDC. All coursework must comply with the Level 9 qualification requirements under the Australian Qualifications Framework .
Master of Philosophy	The Master of Philosophy (MPhil) may be awarded to a candidate who completes a piece of research that demonstrates an original contribution in their field of study and who has met the advanced coursework requirements of the degree.	Complete between 18 and 24 Units of Credit of coursework at a level by the Faculty HDC. The coursework must be completed within the first year of enrolment. All coursework must comply with the Level 9 qualification requirements under the Australian Qualifications Framework .

2. Completion timeframes

- 2.1. Candidates are expected to complete their degree within the standard HDR course timeframes outlined in Table 2.

Table 2 Standard HDR Course Timeframes

Degree	Minimum course duration	Maximum course duration
Doctor of Philosophy and Professional Doctorate	3 years FTE	4 years FTE
Master by Research and Master of Philosophy	1.5 years FTE	2 years FTE

- 2.2. Candidates unable to complete their degree within the maximum timeframe are required to apply for overtime enrolment as outlined in the *Higher Degree Research Variation of Candidature Instruction*.

Effective: [XX Month] 2026

Responsible: PVCRT & Dean of Graduate Research

Lead: Director, GRS

Higher Degree Research Admissions Procedure

1. Introduction

This procedure supports the Higher Degree Research Policy by setting out the requirements for Higher Degree Research (HDR) admissions at UNSW.

For more information about HDR admissions please read the *Higher Degree Research Admission Instruction*.

2. Admission and commencement requirements

- 2.1. Candidates will only be admitted to an HDR program if there is a supervisory team available and appropriate resources to support timely completion (see principle 1.2 and 1.6).
- 2.2. Candidates must complete their research at a UNSW campus or approved location, such as a teaching hospital, research field station or research institute. Approved locations provide candidates with access to:
 - Supervision
 - Facilities
 - Resources
 - Safe environment
 - Research community
- 2.3. Candidates may be awarded a scholarship during admission to support their studies, as outlined in the *Higher Degree Research Scholarship Procedure*.
- 2.4. Candidates enrolled in a joint HDR program may be enrolled at an approved location within another institution.
- 2.5. International applicants are required to meet the [Genuine Student requirement](#) set by the Australian Government.

3. Minimum academic requirements

- 3.1. All applicants must have the academic qualifications and relevant research experience to successfully complete the HDR program they apply for. Academic requirements are outlined in the *Higher Degree Research Admission Instruction*.
- 3.2. Faculties may set additional selection criteria that applicants need to meet. These additional requirements will assess the applicant's capacity for success in that specific program.

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Lead: Director, GRS

Higher Degree Research Scholarship Procedure

1. Introduction

UNSW participates in the Australian Government's Research Training Program (RTP) and offers RTP scholarships as part of a suite of HDR scholarships to support suitably qualified candidates.

HDR scholarships provide financial support to support the completion of a UNSW HDR program. They may include tuition fee support and/or a living allowance.

This procedure outlines the requirements for Higher Degree Research (HDR) scholarships at UNSW.

For more detailed information, please read the *Higher Degree Research Scholarship Instruction*.

2. Requirements

- 2.1. Scholarship providers must conduct a competitive process for selecting scholarship recipients that is equitable and fair.
- 2.2. Applicants must meet the requirements for HDR admission to be eligible for a scholarship as outlined in the *Higher Degree Research Admissions Procedure*.
- 2.3. The minimum stipend rate at UNSW is set by the Dean of Graduate Research. The rate will be published on the GRS website. The rate will be \$39,206 in 2026 and will be indexed annually.
- 2.4. Scholarships for doctoral programs must be funded for a minimum of 3.5 years and a maximum of 4 years.
- 2.5. Scholarships for Master programs must be funded for a minimum of 1.5 years and a maximum of 2 years.
- 2.6. Funding for HDR scholarships may come from a range of sources, including:
 - RTP scholarships
 - The Commonwealth Government and other government sources
 - UNSW (Divisions, Faculties, Institutes, Schools and Centres)
 - Individual and corporate donors
 - International and regional organisations.
- 2.7. All scholarship holders will receive a scholarship letter of offer which includes the terms and conditions for the scholarship awarded.
- 2.8. HDR scholarships do not make the recipient an employee, or require them to provide services to the scholarship provider or UNSW.

3. Scholarship administration

- 3.1. The Graduate Research School (GRS) administers all HDR scholarships at UNSW. This can include HDR scholarships awarded by an external scholarship provider who has assigned the financial management of the scholarship to UNSW.

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Higher Degree Research Supervision Procedure

1. Introduction

This procedure outlines the key requirements for HDR supervision at UNSW. For detailed information, including eligibility criteria, role descriptions, registration requirements and supervisory team requirements, please refer to the *Higher Degree Research Supervision Instruction*.

2. Supervision requirements

- 2.1. All HDR candidates must have a supervisory team of at least two supervisors who meet the requirements for HDR supervision. The team must include either a primary or joint supervisor who will take primary academic responsibility for the candidate during their enrolment.
- 2.2. Supervisors must have the qualifications, knowledge and skills relevant to their supervisory role. They must be active in research and publishing, or otherwise making original contributions to a relevant field or discipline.
- 2.3. Supervisors must build a positive professional relationship with candidates and foster a collegial and ethical research training culture to support candidate success. This must be in line with the supervision requirements outlined below.
- 2.4. Supervisors must be aware that the supervisory role is inherently hierarchical. This creates a power imbalance between supervisors and candidates. Intimate relationships between supervisors and candidates are inappropriate.
- 2.5. All UNSW staff and affiliates are obligated to disclose any actual, perceived or potential conflict of interest that may arise in relation to a HDR supervision arrangement, in line with the [Code of Conduct and Values](#) and this policy (see [principle 1.9](#)).
- 2.6. Changes to supervisory teams are managed in line with the Higher Degree Research Variation of Candidature Instruction and the Higher Degree Research Supervision Instruction.

3. The supervisor-candidate relationship

- 3.1. Supervisors and candidates should communicate their expectations of each other. This includes how both parties will maintain clear and regular communication with each other as well as:
 - a. meeting scheduling and preparation
 - b. plan development
 - c. candidature milestones
 - d. how feedback will be provided.
- 3.2. Supervisors and candidates must be conscious and respectful of the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion in their relationship.
- 3.3. Candidates and supervisors are expected to follow UNSW processes for resolving conflict. All parties work together in good faith and with mutual respect. Schools and Faculties manage any such conflicts proactively and with sensitivity.
- 3.4. Supervisors, Schools and Faculties work together to ensure continuous supervision throughout the candidate's enrolment.
- 3.5. Candidates have a key role in identifying their supervisory team before applying for admission. If

a change in supervision is needed after admission, the supervisory team, School and Faculty work closely with the candidate to source suitable alternative supervision.

4. Foster a strong research training culture that is engaged with local and global scholarly communities

- 4.1. Supervisors support candidates to develop their research skills and engage with on-campus, national and global scholarly communities through networking, mentoring and development activities.
- 4.2. Supervisors support the candidate's career development by expanding their research, professional and transferrable skills.
- 4.3. Supervisors and candidates share their research findings in a way that is appropriate to their discipline.
- 4.4. Supervisors and candidates are aware of managing conflicts of interest and competing interests in authorship, data and intellectual property.

5. Promote responsible conduct of research

- 5.1. Supervisors confirm that appropriate facilities and resources are available to support any proposed HDR research project in a safe manner. They must confirm the availability of required facilities and resources with the Head of School.
- 5.2. Supervisors and candidates understand and comply with all relevant national standards and UNSW policies. They seek specialist advice where needed.
- 5.3. Supervisors and candidates understand and comply with UNSW policy on workplace health and safety. This includes completing training, reporting any hazards and incidents, and considering all health and safety aspects of the research being undertaken.
- 5.4. Supervisors promote training and education for candidates in the responsible conduct of research. This includes completing relevant training, identifying the data in the candidate's project, clarifying ownership and access rights, and ensuring proper data storage.

6. Support candidates to become independent researchers

- 6.1. Supervisors and candidates work together to:
 - develop a feasible research proposal
 - maintain consistent progress
 - proactively engage with Research Progress Reviews
 - ensure that the program is completed within the standard course timeframe for the program as outlined in the *Higher Degree Research Conditions for Award Procedure*.
- 6.2. Supervisors support candidates to meet the requirements of the examination process (including written and oral components), and address examiner feedback.
- 6.3. Supervisors, Schools, and Faculties engage in consistent and proactive reporting and management of all aspects of candidature including admission, Confirmation of Candidature, Research Progress Reviews, and HDR examinations.

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Lead: Director, GRS

Higher Degree Research Progression Procedure

1. Introduction

This procedure sets out the requirements for Higher Degree Research (HDR) progression at UNSW.

For more information about Research Progress Reviews and Confirmation of Candidature, please read the *Higher Degree Research Progression Instruction*.

2. Enrolment requirements

- 2.1. Candidates must be enrolled for each term of their program. Candidates can apply for leave as outlined in the *Higher Degree Research Variation of Candidature Instruction*. Candidates who have not enrolled or been approved for program leave will be discontinued.
- 2.2. Full-time candidates are expected to commit around 35 - 40 hours per week to their research.
- 2.3. Part-time candidates are expected to commit around 15 – 20 hours per week to their studies.
- 2.4. Candidates must ensure that their enrolment and contact details are correct in myUNSW. International candidates must contact the Department of Home Affairs if their details change.
- 2.5. Candidates may make changes to their candidature provided they are requested and approved in line with the *Higher Degree Research Variation of Candidature Instruction*.
- 2.6. Candidates cannot enrol in a UNSW HDR program alongside any other degree, diploma or certificate program at UNSW or another higher education provider. This includes candidates who are being assessed for coursework or research in another degree. The Pro Vice-Chancellor Research Training and Dean of Graduate Research and relevant Faculty must approve exceptions.

3. Progression

- 3.1. Candidates should meet with their supervisors regularly to receive feedback and ensure they remain on track for timely completion.
- 3.2. Candidates should meet with their supervisors soon after they commence to confirm:
 - UNSW, faculty and school requirements and resources
 - support in accessing resources in another faculty or school for interdisciplinary elements of their research
 - expectations that the supervisor and candidate have of each other about the project (e.g. meeting schedule, feedback and review schedule, communication)
 - research goals, milestones, deadlines, and a timeline to completion
 - initial milestones (meet within the first three months of enrolment).

4. Annual Research Progress Reviews

Research Progress Reviews (reviews) are a key mechanism through which UNSW supports HDR candidates to complete their studies within the course timeframes set out in the *Higher Degree Research Conditions for Award Procedure*.

- 4.1. Reviews are intended to be a positive and productive process that provides candidates with:

- Opportunity to develop their skills in presenting and defending their work.
 - An affirmation that they are progressing well (where satisfactory progress has been achieved).
 - Support in developing a research plan and milestones for the period up to the next review.
 - An opportunity to have their research and supervision arrangements reviewed by an independent panel.
 - A safe environment to raise any issues they feel are impacting their progress.
- 4.2. Candidates must participate in a review once every year. Their progress will be assessed against agreed milestones as outlined in the *Higher Degree Research Progression Instruction*. This is a condition of ongoing enrolment and applies to both full-time and part-time candidates.
 - 4.3. Progress is assessed on a full-time equivalent basis, and milestones are appropriate to the candidate's study load.
 - 4.4. Reviews are conducted by an independent review panel (panel) of at least two members.
 - 4.5. Candidates will be provided with any faculty/school review guidelines during the faculty/school induction at the start of their degree, and before their first review is held.
 - 4.6. A supplementary review may be held to support candidates who need additional support to maintain progress. Supplementary reviews can be requested by the ADRT (or equivalent), PGC, supervisor or candidate.

5. Confirmation Review for doctoral candidates

- 5.1. Doctoral candidates undertake a Confirmation Review when they have reached 0.75 EFTSL – 1 EFTSL and must be confirmed in their candidature no later than 1.25 EFTSL.
- 5.2. The purpose of the Confirmation Review is to confirm that the candidate is on track to complete their doctoral degree on time.
- 5.3. Candidates are assessed against Confirmation milestones set by UNSW (see the *Higher Degree by Research Progression Instruction* for details).
- 5.4. Doctoral candidates enrolled in a part-time study load will participate in a pre-Confirmation Review as part of their annual review of progress.

Effective: [XX Month] 2026

Responsible: PVCRT & Dean of Graduate Research

Lead: Director, GRS



Higher Degree Research Examination Procedure

1. Introduction

This procedure supports the Higher Degree Research Policy by setting out the requirements for Higher Degree Research (HDR) examinations at UNSW.

For more information please read the *Higher Degree Research Examination Instruction*.

2. Examination process

- 2.1. HDR examination assesses a candidate's ability to undertake a research project and produce a piece of research that meets the requirements outlined in the *Higher Degree Research Conditions for Award Procedure*.
- 2.2. The examination process will:
 - determine if the candidate produced an original piece of research that meets the conditions for award of their degree, as outlined in the *Higher Degree Research Conditions for Award Procedure*
 - establish if the candidate fully understands the work and its wider implications
 - provide the candidate with an opportunity to reply to criticism and respond to questions
 - enable the examiners to clarify issues in the thesis
 - allow the examiners to decide on the nature, content and extent of any revisions which may be required
 - verify the candidate's contribution to the thesis
 - ensure that the candidate understands and has appropriately acknowledged the contribution of any research collaborators.
- 2.3. HDR Examination is undertaken independently.
- 2.4. All HDR candidates enrolled from T1 2023 onward will defend their work in an oral examination.
- 2.5. To be awarded the degree, all examination components must be assessed as satisfactory against the examination criteria stated in the *Higher Degree Research Examination Instruction*.
- 2.6. The research described in the thesis must have been completed during the candidature. The thesis cannot include any work or material that has previously been submitted for a university degree or other similar award.
- 2.7. UNSW is committed to open access of its research outputs and HDR theses are made publicly available in the Library.

Effective: [XX Month] 2026

Responsible: PVCRT & Dean of Graduate Research

Lead: Director, GRS



Appendix 1

Authority for Procedures and Instructions

The following UNSW officers are authorised to maintain and change the procedure sections of this policy in line with the *Policy Framework Policy*:

1. Pro Vice-Chancellor Research Training and Dean of Graduate Research
2. Director, Graduate Research School

Legislative compliance

This policy is intended to ensure that UNSW complies with the:

1. [Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011 \(Cth\)](#)
2. [Higher Education Standards Framework \(Threshold Standards\) 2015 \(Cth\)](#)
3. [Australian Qualifications Framework](#)
4. [Higher Education Support \(Commonwealth Scholarships\) Guidelines 2025](#)
5. [National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence](#)

Supporting documents

- [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](#)
- [Code of Conduct and Values](#)
- Conduct, Complaints and Misconduct Policy
- [Delegations Policy and schedules](#)
- Facilities and Resources to Support Higher Degree Research Candidates Instruction
- [Health and Safety Policy](#)
- Higher Degree Research Admission Instruction
- Higher Degree Research Examination Instruction
- Higher Degree Research Overtime Enrolment Instruction
- Higher Degree Research Progression Instruction
- Higher Degree Research Scholarships Instruction
- Higher Degree Research Show Cause Instruction
- Higher Degree Research Supervision Instruction
- Higher Degree Research Variation of Candidature Instruction
- [Information Governance Policy](#)
- Intellectual Property and Commercialisation Policy
- Roles and Responsibilities of Postgraduate Research Coordinators Instruction
- [Universities Australia Principles for Respectful Supervisory Relationships](#)

Definitions and acronyms	
ADRT	Associate Dean Research Training
AI	Artificial intelligence
EFTSL	Equivalent Full Time Study Load

FTE	Full time equivalent
GRIS	Graduate Research Information System
GRS	Graduate Research School
HDC	Higher Degree Committee
HDR	Higher Degree Research
MPhil	Master of Philosophy
MRes	Master by Research
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PGC	Postgraduate Coordinator
Prof Doc	Professional Doctorate
PVCRT	Pro Vice-Chancellor Research Training
RTP	Australian Government Research Training Program