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Executive Summary

This Guideline outlines an alternative pathway into higher degrees by research (HDR) which recognises non-traditional entry pathways where research skills and abilities have been developed through sector-based experience and/or publications.

More information

For further information, contact the Graduate Research Office

Email: graduate.research@utas.edu.au

Background

People returning to university to do a Masters Degree (Research) or Doctoral Degree after a number of years in the workforce may possess significant sector-based research or equivalent experience, but often either lack suitable formal academic credentials or a substantial length of time has passed since they obtained such qualifications.

Higher degree by research (HDR) entry requirements and scholarship rankings traditionally relied on prospective candidates holding a strong honours degree so, in the past, such applicants were uncompetitive for scholarship and candidature places, regardless of their level of ability or expertise. Thus, applicants without the requisite honours qualification seldom received a scholarship or had the financial option to study full time and; the part-time option meant that calendar time completion was protracted.

Today, successful completion of minimum bachelor degree with honours or an equivalent qualification is considered the traditional pathway which demonstrates the skills and merit required to undertake a higher degree; applicants coming from non-traditional pathways can also possess outstanding research skills. Given the core entry issue is the quality of an applicant’s research skills and abilities, those able to demonstrate satisfactorily skills are now being offered a level playing field on which to compete for candidature places and scholarships.

Opening this additional pathway will attract high quality candidates from a broader pool. It also addresses issues relating to conversion of load to completion within Maximum Degree Period, as well as the university’s need to increase of its recruitment of quality candidates.

The Confirmation of Candidature process provides a checkpoint to ensure all candidates meet the expected standards for graduate research; the probation period preceding Confirmation, 11 months EFT for PhD, 7 months EFT for Masters, beholds a candidate to demonstrate that they have the necessary skills and ability to conduct research at the appropriate higher degree level.

Eligibility requirements for entry into the HDR

Rule 4’s clauses 5 and 6 outline the qualifications and entry requirements for graduate research degrees:
Rule 5.1 (b) stipulates that entry to a Masters Degree (Research) or a Doctoral Degree may be possible where an applicant:

*has substantial experience in a sector related to the proposed Research Project and who satisfies the Dean of their fitness to undertake research on the basis of the standard of achievement in, and the relevance of, previous higher education studies, and professional experience or published research work*

**Documenting and assessing research skills and abilities developed through non-conventional pathways**

Four broad categories of academic skills can be identified as central for eligibility to HDR:

1. Conceptual and theoretical understanding/knowledge of the field
2. Research design, data collection and data management skills/ability to undertake research
3. Analytical and interpretative skills (e.g. data analysis, critical analysis, problem solving)
4. Communication skills (written and verbal)

The attainment of first class honours reflects excellence and a high level of attainment against these skills. Where attainment of these skills has been achieved through a less traditional pathway, graduate research applicants are encouraged to make contact with their school of interest and collate material which demonstrates their level of competency against the four skills areas identified above for the School’s consideration.

Following discussions with their prospective supervisor/s, an applicant should complete Part 1 of the HDR application form and submit it to their school of interest, potentially with a portfolio of supporting material. This material might include the following components:

- a detailed cover letter with an overview of the material included and an evidence-based assessment of the applicant’s ability to undertake a research degree;
- structured statements about prior work, accompanied by reflections on the relationship of this work to the four key academic skills areas above;
- Documentary evidence in the form of: previous publications, reports, presentations, project descriptions, job descriptions, letters from referees, etc.

A candidate’s application and/or portfolio of material will be assessed by the School – normally the proposed Primary Supervisor and/or the Graduate Research Coordinator or nominee.

If the assessors agree that the evidence provided by the prospective candidate demonstrates a high level of achievement in the four skill categories (equivalent to a bachelor degree with second or first class standard honours or equivalent qualification, depending on the higher degree level applied for) then justification will be made to the Dean that the prospective candidate possesses the skills commensurate with those required for HDR. This recommendation must take the form of a School Recommendation. See pro forma at [http://www.utas.edu.au/research/graduate-research/future-candidates/how-to-apply](http://www.utas.edu.au/research/graduate-research/future-candidates/how-to-apply).

**Decision and Approval**

The Dean may approve or reject an Application for Higher Degree by Research Candidature and Scholarship based on his level of satisfaction with the case presented to him.
Glossary

**Doctoral Degree**
Means both a Doctor of Philosophy and Doctoral Degree (Professional) unless otherwise specified.

**Graduate Research Coordinator (GRC)**
The GRC is an Academic Staff Member who oversees candidature supervision within a School in consultation with the Head of School, appointed in accordance with Rule 4 and the Procedures of Graduate Research.

**HDR**
Higher Degree Research.

**Primary Supervisor**
The Primary Supervisor is a supervisor appointed in accordance with Rule 4 who is responsible for ensuring that all administrative and regulatory requirements prescribed for candidates in the Procedures are met by the candidate.

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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Version date</strong></td>
<td>October, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Status</strong></td>
<td>Approved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Revision information</strong></td>
<td>3 years from approval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose</strong></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Authors</strong></td>
<td>EO and Dean Graduate Research</td>
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**Revision History**

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<th>Comments</th>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Month 201x</td>
<td>Draft for x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x</td>
<td>October 2011</td>
<td>Draft for consideration by endorsing committee</td>
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**Guideline Approval**

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<tr>
<td><strong>Responsible Officer</strong></td>
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