

Higher Degree by Research - Progression Procedure

Section 1 - Preamble

(1) Charles Darwin University ('the University', 'CDU') is committed to providing an environment that enables and supports transformative education through higher degrees by research (HDR) and drives world-class research in areas critical to the sustainable and prosperous development of Northern Australia and the wider region.

Section 2 - Purpose

(2) This procedure sets out the process for establishing milestones and training requirements for Higher Degree by Research (HDR) candidates, including research proposals and supervision charters.

(3) This procedure also sets out how progress and milestones are to be monitored, reported and, where necessary, enforced.

Section 3 - Scope

(4) This procedure applies to all HDR courses, candidates enrolled in HDR courses, and University staff responsible for supporting HDR candidates and courses.

Section 4 - Procedure

Induction

(5) All HDR Candidates must receive comprehensive induction information during the first month of their candidature. As part of this induction, Research and Innovation will outline:

- a. the resources, facilities, and services that are available to all HDR candidates;
- b. the milestones and training that all HDR candidates must complete;
- c. the forms that candidates must complete to demonstrate their progress, to request leave, to update their enrolment, or to submit their thesis; and
- d. the rules, policies, and procedures that HDR candidates must observe, including regulations on research integrity and the [Code of Conduct - Students](#).

(6) CDU Global will provide information that is specific to the needs of international candidates.

(7) The faculty, or the Menzies School of Health Research, in which the candidate is assigned (the home faculty) will provide information that is relevant to specific cohorts such as:

- a. safe work practices in a particular field;
- b. organising resources and funding; and
- c. other practices that are particular to the home faculty.

(8) The principal supervisor should help candidates better understand their course and University.

Confirmation of candidature

(9) Until candidates successfully complete their confirmation of candidature, they are admitted on a probationary basis. To complete the confirmation of candidature, candidates must agree to the HDR Student and Supervision Charter, submit an extensive research proposal, and complete an oral presentation. In some circumstances, candidates may also need to fulfill specific conditions that are stipulated in the offer letter.

(10) The Dean of Graduate Studies may waive the Confirmation of Candidature requirement for candidates submitting a thesis by prior publication. Such candidates must undertake a review approved by the home faculty and Dean of Graduate Studies within six months of commencement. This review requirement will be included in the candidate's letter of offer.

(11) The Dean of Graduate Studies may provide reciprocal approval of confirmation of candidature for candidates transferring their HDR candidature from another university and having already undertaken a similar process on submission of the relevant evidence.

HDR student and supervisor charter

(12) Within three months of commencement, candidates must sign a declaration to say they have read and understood the CDU HDR Student and Supervisor Charter.

(13) The University has measures to evaluate and ensure compliance with this charter, including student and supervisor training and assessment.

Research proposal

(14) Candidates write a research proposal between 7,000 to 10,000 words if enrolled in a PhD and 5,000 to 7,000 words if enrolled in a Masters by Research. This is submitted to the home faculty with a Research Proposal Coversheet form found at [HDR Forms and Codes](#).

(15) This research proposal must include:

- a. an abstract, or an overview of the research and its objectives, or both;
- b. a literature review to justify the importance and unique contribution of this research;
- c. a description and justification of the approach, methodology, and analysis;
- d. ethical, legal, and safety considerations;
- e. the budget;
- f. a timeline of activities to complete; and
- g. a communication plan, such as any likely publications.

(16) The principal supervisor will review the research proposal, confirm compliance with applicable regulations, e.g. the autonomous sanctions and foreign arrangements schemes, and either:

- a. endorse the proposal and progress it to confirmation of candidature; or
- b. reject the proposal, provide feedback, and recommend remedial action.

Confirmation of candidature panel and presentation

(17) Students must pass a confirmation of candidature within 12 months FTE or their candidature may be cancelled. HDR students who have not completed their confirmation of candidature within the required timelines,

notwithstanding approved leave, will be asked to show cause as to why their enrolment should be maintained.

(18) The initial Confirmation of Candidature (CoC) presentation must be completed between 6 – 10 months FTE, to allow time for reassessment if required. The research proposal must be made available to the CoC panel at least 2 weeks in advance of the CoC presentation.

(19) The home faculty in collaboration with the Associate Dean Research will organise a confirmation of candidature panel, comprising three or more academics, including a chair. One of the student's supervisors may be included on the CoC panel if that person is not the chair and at least two of the CoC panel members are not from the student's supervision panel. The confirmation of candidature panel will assess the research proposal and oral presentation, including whether:

- a. the supervisors of this candidate have the requisite capabilities in the theories and methods of this research project;
- b. the candidate has acquired, or could readily acquire, the capabilities they need to complete the project;
- c. the research project is suitable and feasible within the timeline, budget, and ethical constraints and is compliant with relevant laws, regulations, policies, and procedures;
- d. the scope, quality and design of this project is appropriate for this degree and length of candidature; and
- e. all key milestones of the degree (eg CoC, Mid-Candidature and final year review) are accurately included in the project timeline.

(20) The composition of the proposed panel will be reviewed by the home faculty and Dean of Graduate Studies, who may approve the panel or require modifications to its composition.

(21) The chair and at least one other panel member must be staff members of the University.

(22) These academics should:

- a. have attained a PhD;
- b. have developed expertise in a related discipline or area of study, or the methodology or research design of the proposed research;
- c. not have an actual, potential, or perceived conflict of interest with the project; and
- d. not have a dependent or romantic relationship with the candidate or any member of the supervisory panel.

(23) Within two working days if possible, the Confirmation of Candidature Panel complete the Faculty Assessment of Research Proposal and Oral Defence form found at [HDR Forms and Codes](#) to evaluate the research proposal and oral presentation and to recommend that:

- a. the candidature should be confirmed;
- b. the research proposal, oral presentation, or both should be revised; or
- c. the candidature should not be confirmed.

(24) The recommendation will be reviewed by the head of the home faculty, or delegate for approval or rejection and then forwarded to the Dean of Graduate Studies for approval or rejection.

(25) If the Dean of Graduate Studies approves the recommendation to revise the research proposal, oral presentation, or both, the Faculty Assessment of Research Proposal and Oral Defence form found at [HDR Forms and Codes](#) must be submitted again, and may involve a new confirmation of candidature panel.

(26) If the Dean of Graduate Studies approves the recommendation to withhold confirmation, they will invite the candidates to show cause as to why their enrolment should be maintained.

(27) If the head of the home faculty or Dean of Graduate Studies does not approve a recommendation to confirm candidature, with or without conditions, the student will be required to undergo reassessment with a new confirmation of candidature panel.

(28) No extensions are permissible for the confirmation of candidature milestone except for approved leave of absence.

Progress after confirmation of candidature

Mid-candidature milestone

(29) PhD candidates commencing their degree from 2023 onwards must complete a written progress report and supply progress to date, such as draft chapters. In addition, the home faculty and Dean of Graduate Studies may require candidates to complete a mid-candidature presentation.

(30) During this presentation and in the progress report, candidates are to outline the research progress to this point and their timelines to completion and submission. Candidates will also describe any challenges they experienced and how they modified their plan to address these challenges or improve their research. The mid-candidature progress report must be made available to the assessment panel at least 2 weeks prior to the presentation.

(31) This presentation should be completed within 18-24 months FTE of commencement. The home faculty will apply a similar process to the confirmation of candidature oral presentations for the mid-candidature presentation and submit the mid-candidature presentation form found at [HDR Forms and Codes](#) to Research and Innovation when this milestone is completed. The mid-candidature presentation may also have a larger audience, such as a wider range of academic staff or industry partners.

(32) The principal supervisor in collaboration with the Associate Dean Research will be responsible for organising a panel of assessors for their students and working with the student and assessment panel to organise the presentation times. Online milestone events are welcomed and encouraged.

(33) Failure to successfully complete the mid-candidature presentation or the progress report within 24 months FTE will culminate in a show cause letter from the Dean of Graduate Studies.

(34) The Dean of Graduate Studies may waive the mid-candidature presentation and progress report requirement for candidates submitting a thesis by prior publication, or in other circumstances on a case-by-case basis.

(35) Due to the length of a Masters by Research course, the mid-thesis review is not required. The students complete a Confirmation of Candidature in their first year and a Final Thesis Review in their final year.

Interim milestones

(36) For all HDR candidates, an interim milestone is due in any year where another milestone (e.g. CoC or mid-candidature presentation) is not scheduled or completed. The intent is to ensure that all students have their progress monitored each year to enable a timely completion.

(37) Students who fail to complete an interim milestone by the due date will be sent a show cause letter from the Dean of Graduate Studies.

(38) Research and Innovation will notify students when they have an interim milestone due. HDR students will be given at least one month to submit an interim milestone. Normally, interim milestones can be conducted without a presentation, but do require a detailed document, including a backwardly mapped timeline to the completion.

(39) An interim milestone can also be deployed at any point during the candidature via the request of a student, supervisor, Associate Dean Research or Dean of Graduate Studies.

Final/third year milestone

(40) From 2024 onwards, all HDR candidates must complete a final/third year milestone, being a draft thesis.

(41) In addition, the home faculty and Dean of Graduate Studies may require candidates to complete a final/third year presentation.

(42) This milestone is due between 30 – 36 months FTE for PhD students and between 18 – 24 months for Masters by Research Students however students who submit their thesis for examination prior to the maximum due date for this milestone will be exempt.

(43) The written report is due to the assessment panel at least 2 weeks prior to the presentation.

(44) Compliance with this milestone will be monitored by Research and Innovation. Students who fail to successfully complete the final year presentation by the due date with the exception of those under examination by that date, will be sent a show cause letter by the Dean of Graduate Studies.

Progress and progress reports

(45) As required, the Dean of Graduate Studies may instruct candidates, principal supervisors, and home faculties to complete a Progress Report Form. These forms outline:

- a. any challenges that candidates and supervisors are experiencing as well as measures that could be introduced to address these challenges;
- b. the extent to which the candidates and supervisors are complying with the HDR Student and Supervisor Charter; and
- c. the progress of candidates on their research, milestones, and training.

(46) In response to these reports:

- a. the home faculty may propose recommended actions;
- b. the Dean of Graduate Studies can approve these recommended actions as well as suggest other actions; and
- c. Research and Innovation will communicate these recommended actions to the principal supervisor and candidate.

(47) If a student's progress is perceived by the principal supervisor, home faculty, or Dean of Graduate Studies to be inadequate, asked to show cause as to why their enrolment should be maintained. If allowed to continue they may be placed on probation by the Dean of Graduate Studies.

(48) If a supervisor does not complete a progress report when requested the Dean of Graduate Studies may consider the removal of a supervisor from the Supervision Register.

Communicating concerns

(49) Outside of the milestone framework, if a faculty Associate Dean Research, Menzies equivalent, or a supervisor has concerns about an HDR student's progress or performance, they should notify the Candidate Progression Coordinator in Research and Innovation in writing including what steps are being taken to address the issues. Any concerns will be discussed with the Dean of Graduate Studies.

(50) If a student has concerns about their progress that they feel is not being effectively addressed by the supervisor or home faculty, they should notify the Candidate Progression Coordinator in Research and Innovation including what steps are being taken to try to have the concerns addressed. Any concerns and actions will be discussed with the Dean of Graduate Studies.

(51) Once a concern is raised, the Dean of Graduate Studies may request a meeting with all or any of the relevant parties such as the student, the supervisor/s and the Associate Dean Research to discuss the issue/s and possible solutions. The student may wish to bring a support person, who is not a solicitor or barrister, to the meeting.

(52) The Dean of Graduate Studies may recommend the following actions and an associated, reasonable timeframe in response to a concern:

- a. ongoing monitoring of the concern by Research and Innovation until it is resolved;
- b. recommend the student apply for a leave of absence;
- c. put the student in touch with other support services as required, in line with the [Support for Students Policy](#) and [Fitness to Study Procedure](#);
- d. changes to the supervisory panel;
- e. supervisor training;
- f. skills development for the student;
- g. a collaborative support plan;
- h. putting the student on probation; and/or
- i. inviting the candidate to show cause as to why their enrolment should be maintained.

(53) Research and Innovation will communicate these recommended actions and any deadlines/timeframes to the principal supervisor and the candidate in writing and monitor the concerns as required.

Collaborative support plan

(54) If a student, supervisor, Associate Dean Research or Dean of Graduate Studies has concerns about progress, an HDR student may be offered a collaborative support plan for three or six months as an alternative to probation. This may include the following as agreed by the parties:

- a. regular meetings with CDU student support, language and learning advisors, the faculty Associate Dean Research and the Dean of Graduate Studies. See the [Life, Health & Wellbeing page](#) for support and information;
- b. a skills development plan for the student which utilises available training courses and resources at CDU; and
- c. skills development training for the supervisor/s.

Contact with the University

(55) HDR candidates are required to maintain regular contact with their supervisors, home faculty, and respond to requests from Research and Innovation.

(56) If an HDR student has had no contact with any of the above for greater than three months, notwithstanding approved leave, and Research and Innovation have attempted to communicate with the student via the email and phone number provided to CDU by the student, the Dean of Graduate Studies may ask the student to show cause as to why their enrolment should be maintained.

Training throughout the candidature

Minimum training

(57) The Confirmation of Enrolment Letter to Candidates will specify:

- a. the minimum training that candidates must complete; and
- b. any training that must be completed before the confirmation of candidature.

(58) This training must be organised or endorsed by the University and include:

- a. a significant level of training in research integrity, including training around falsification, fabrication, plagiarism, authorship, data management, and research ethics; and
- b. training in research, personal, and career skills.

(59) Candidates will need to maintain evidence they have completed this training. Evidence may include certificates of completion or summaries of the skills they acquired. Candidates cannot be awarded the degree until they fulfill this minimum level of training unless approved by the Research Committee.

Development plan

(60) Candidates should construct a development plan and update this plan over time in concert with their supervisors. This plan should stipulate:

- a. the knowledge, skills, and attributes the candidates should acquire to facilitate their research and career; and
- b. how and when they plan to acquire these capabilities, such as which courses or internships they will complete.

(61) When completing progress reports, supervisors will be invited to indicate the degree to which candidates have achieved this plan.

Ongoing training

(62) Students should discuss with their principal supervisor attending relevant training sessions at all stages across their candidature. For example:

- a. workshops, conferences, and other events organised by the University or other entities; and
- b. informal opportunities, such as peer discussions and website materials.

Probation and show cause letters

HDR candidate probation

(63) If the Dean of Graduate Studies places an HDR student on probation they will specify:

- a. the length of probation period;
- b. the expected outcomes during and on conclusion of the probationary period;
- c. the support the student should expect from their supervisors and home faculty;
- d. how often the student must report to Research and Innovation;
- e. what other University support services the student should access (if any); and
- f. any skills development training.

Outcome of show cause letters

(64) If a show cause letter is issued for any of the reasons outlined in this procedure or in the [Higher Degree by Research Policy](#), the candidate will be given 10 business days to respond. The deadline to respond will be specified in the letter.

(65) Once the candidate has responded to the show cause letter, the Dean of Graduate Studies may consult the candidate's supervisory panel and/or home faculty and share the candidate's response with them.

(66) The Dean of Graduate Studies will determine one of the following outcomes:

- a. the candidate may remain enrolled, with no conditions;
- b. the candidate may remain enrolled but be placed on probation; or

c. the candidate's enrolment will be cancelled.

(67) If the candidate does not respond by the deadline specified in the show cause letter, the candidate's enrolment will be cancelled.

Appeals

(68) An HDR candidate can appeal a termination of candidature in accordance with Step 3 of the [Complaints Policy - Students](#).

Section 5 - Non-Compliance

(69) Non-compliance with Governance Documents is considered a breach of the [Code of Conduct - Employees](#) or the [Code of Conduct - Students](#), as applicable, and is treated seriously by the University. Reports of concerns about non-compliance will be managed in accordance with the applicable disciplinary procedures outlined in the [Charles Darwin University and Union Enterprise Agreement 2025](#) and the [Code of Conduct - Students](#).

(70) Complaints may be raised in accordance with the [Complaints and Grievance Policy and Procedure - Employees](#) and [Complaints Policy - Students](#).

(71) All staff members have an individual responsibility to raise any suspicion, allegation or report of fraud or corruption in accordance with the [Fraud and Corruption Control Policy](#) and [Whistleblower Reporting \(Improper Conduct\) Procedure](#).

Status and Details

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Responsible Executive	Steve Rogers Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Community Connection +61 8 89466890
Implementation Officer	Steven Greenland Dean of Graduate Studies
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Glossary Terms and Definitions

"Home faculty" - The Faculty in which a Higher Degree by Research candidate is enrolled. The Menzies School of Health Research is the home faculty for students of Menzies.

"University" - Charles Darwin University, a body corporate established under section 4 of the Charles Darwin University Act 2003. The University is comprised of the various faculties, CDU TAFE, organisational units, and formal committees, including the governing University Council and Academic Board.