

HDR Milestones Policy

Section 1 - Overview & Scope

- (1) This Policy outlines milestone and progression requirements for Higher Degree by Research (HDR) Candidates.
- (2) The University of New England is responsible for the delivery of high-quality research training programs that are academically rigorous and promote responsible research conduct.
- (3) This Policy ensures that:
- a. supervisors of HDR Candidates have the appropriate skills, qualifications, and resources;
 - b. the University provides guidance and mentorship on responsible research conduct to HDR Candidates under their supervision and, where appropriate, monitors their progress and conduct;
 - c. the University provides ongoing training and education that promotes and supports responsible research conduct for all researchers and those in other relevant roles; and
 - d. all HDR Candidates have an annual review.
- (4) This Policy applies to HDR Candidates, HDR Supervisors, and UNE Representatives.
- (5) Within this policy:
- a. Part A - states the principles of this policy;
 - b. Part B - outlines HDR Candidate progression and milestones;
 - c. Part C - outlines the membership and functions of the Milestones Review Panel;
 - d. Part D - outlines milestone outcomes;
 - e. Part E - outlines the milestone outcome appeal process;
 - f. Part F - outlines general roles and responsibilities of UNE staff and HDR Candidates; and
 - g. Part G - outlines milestone completion and student progress reporting requirements.

Section 2 - Policy

Part A - Policy Principles

- (6) The University recognises a HDR Candidate's right to reasonable supervisory support and guidance for their program of study throughout their enrolment.
- (7) The University is committed to providing structured progress management to all HDR Candidates to ensure satisfactory progress is being made by HDR Candidates by identifying and supporting them to address progress issues which may arise during their enrolment.
- (8) The University recognises the importance of providing HDR Candidates with constructive and rigorous feedback on their proposed program of research.

(9) Milestone reviews must consider quality and progress, a HDR Candidate's plans for professional development to facilitate and finalise high quality, ethical and timely research, under the guidance of appropriate supervision.

(10) Research integrity, research ethics, supervision issues and wellbeing, health and safety must also be considered as an integral part of the milestone review.

(11) The HDR Milestone Policy is underpinned by the University's research policy framework and principles that have been developed in accordance with the [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research \(ACRCR\) 2018 \(the Code\)](#).

Part B - HDR Candidate Progression & Milestones

(12) HDR Candidature progression is monitored through compulsory periodic progress reviews. Progress reviews plays an important role in:

- a. the academic development and progress of the candidate;
- b. resources allocation (including supervisory commitments); and
- c. ensuring quality assurance of HDR programs at the University of New England.

(13) HDR candidature progression is supported by a sequence of activities that include an induction and three milestone reviews. They are designed to support and facilitate a HDR Candidate's progress towards their thesis submission date, providing them with an opportunity to receive structured feedback on their progress to date.

(14) Milestones provide an opportunity for HDR Candidates to raise any issues that are affecting progress, so that action to address these issues can be considered and implemented where appropriate.

(15) The requirements for each milestone are defined by the HDR Candidate's stage of research and may include requirements specific to their discipline.

(16) As a minimum, a milestone must comprise of an oral presentation at an open forum, a written submission from the HDR Candidate, and an interview with a Milestone Review Panel.

(17) Written feedback must be provided to the HDR Candidate after each milestone and annual review.

(18) For HDR Candidates enrolled through a collaborative research training agreement or joint PhD, HDR Candidature milestones should align with the requirements of the partner institutions where possible.

Timing

(19) Doctoral Candidates must undertake three milestones and Masters by Research Candidates must undertake two.

(20) Recommended timings of the milestones for full-time HDR Candidates are outlined in the below table:

Full-time equivalent Milestones	Masters by Research Candidate Timing	Doctoral Candidate Timing
Induction including Supervision Agreement form submission	3 months FTE after commencement	3 months FTE after commencement
Confirmation of Candidate (Milestone 1)	6 months FTE after commencement	12 months FTE after commencement
Mid-Point Review (Milestone 2)	N/A	24 months FTE after commencement
Pre-Submission Review (Milestone 3)	18 months FTE after commencement	36 months FTE after commencement

(21) Recommended timings of the milestones for part-time HDR Candidates are outlined in the below table:

Part-time Candidate Milestones	Masters by Research Candidate Timing	Doctoral Candidate Candidate Timing
Induction including SSA form submission	3 months after commencement	3 months after commencement
Confirmation of Candidate (Milestone 1)	12 months after commencement	24 months after commencement
Mid-Point Review (Milestone 2)	N/A	48 months after commencement
Pre-Submission Review (Milestone 3)	36 months after commencement	72 months after commencement

Induction & Researcher Development

(22) All HDR Candidates must complete the mandatory inductions as set out in the Research Development Training Procedure.

(23) HDR Candidates must complete a [Supervision Agreement](#) Form (SA Form) within three months of commencement.

(24) In addition to the training candidates receive within their supervision, the Graduate Research School will offer developmental activities and opportunities to support a HDR Candidate's professional development skills as a researcher. The purpose of these training opportunities is to support the HDR Candidate's research and develop all aspects of the researcher identity. This training includes, but is not limited to:

- orientation program, relating to University governance including relevant codes, regulations, policies and procedures;
- induction program(s) relating to research governance (including responsible research conduct), preparation of ethics applications (if relevant) and formulation of a Research Data Management plan;
- training and support to assist candidates attaining candidature milestones including theses preparation, pre-submission seminar and responding to examiner comments;
- professional development to support the development of generic and transferable skills;
- professional and/or social networking opportunities;
- opportunities to present at conference(s), both internal and external to UNE.

Confirmation of Candidature - Milestone 1

(25) Confirmation of Candidature (Milestone 1) will take place no later than 12 months FTE for Doctoral HDR Candidates or 6 months FTE for Masters HDR Candidates after commencement.

(26) The purpose of the Confirmation of Candidature (Milestone 1) is to:

- assess whether the HDR Candidate has a viable research project that is achievable and appropriate for the program in which they are enrolled;
- confirm the HDR Candidate feels supported and equipped to complete the program within the required timeframes; and
- ensure the HDR Candidate receives independent written feedback about any issues that need to be addressed.
- provide feedback on the HDR Candidate's overall performance, including reviewing, where applicable, the HDR Candidate's completion of the compulsory inductions, training activities or coursework units, while also ensuring that the candidate's research direction is sound, their methodologies are appropriate and the standard of their comprehension and writing is in accordance with the requirements of their degree.
- confirm, where relevant, that appropriate ethics and Intellectual Property (IP) arrangements are in place,

ensuring that a plan of action is agreed to where there are issues;

- f. confirm that the HDR Candidate demonstrates understanding of, and the capacity to adhere to, the University's applicable policies and procedures as they relate to research and academic integrity matters, including the Graduate Research roles and responsibilities;
- g. ensure that the resources available to the HDR Candidate, including supervision and facilities, are adequate for the purpose of the research project by their thesis submission date;
- h. provide HDR Candidates with the opportunity to receive peer review feedback on their research and oral presentation and development of presentation/communication skills from experienced researchers; and
- i. enable a formal recommendation to be made that the HDR Candidate has either met or is yet to demonstrate satisfactory progress.

(27) The status of a HDR Candidate will change from provisional to confirmed upon the successful completion of the Confirmation of Candidature (Milestone 1).

(28) Once they have received their confirmed status, HDR Candidates must submit a budget outlining how they will allocate their allotted HDR Support Funding as per the Minimum Facilities Procedure.

Mid-Point Review - Milestone 2

(29) The Mid-Point Review (Milestone 2) will take place 24 months FTE after commencement for Doctoral HDR Candidates and is not mandatory for Masters by Research candidates.

(30) The purpose of the Mid-Point Review (Milestone 2) is to:

- a. ensure the HDR Candidate's progress since Confirmation remains satisfactory, and that they have met any requirements agreed to as part of the Confirmation process;
- b. confirm the HDR Candidate is able to demonstrate command of their research both in written and oral forms;
- c. ensure the HDR Candidate receives independent written feedback and direction on any issues that may need to be addressed.
- d. ensure the HDR Candidate remains on track to complete their research project by their thesis submission date;
- e. assess whether the HDR Candidate's research skills are developing appropriately, and where applicable, the candidate has completed, or is in the process of completing, training activities or coursework units as per their program requirements;
- f. confirm whether any changes to the HDR Candidate's research program necessitate changes to ethics approvals, IP assignment etc;
- g. confirm that the HDR Candidate continues to demonstrate understanding of, and the capacity to adhere to, the University's applicable policies and procedures as they relate to research and academic integrity; and
- h. ensure the resources available to the HDR Candidate, including supervision and facilities, are adequate for the purpose of completion of the degree within the required timeframe

Pre-Submission Review - Milestone 3

(31) The Pre-Submission Review will take place no later than 36 months FTE for Doctoral HDR Candidates or no later than 18 months FTE for Masters by Research Candidates after commencement.

(32) HDR Candidates who seek re-admission for the purpose of examination may be exempt from completing the Pre-Submission Review (Milestone 3), providing the School is satisfied that the HDR Candidate's research is ready for examination.

(33) The purpose of the Pre-Submission Review (Milestone 3) is to:

- a. assess whether the HDR Candidate's progress is satisfactory, and the project is on track for completion within the required timeframe;
- b. ensure that the scope, originality and quality of the HDR Candidate's thesis will be of an appropriate standard for external examination by the expected submission date;
- c. assess whether the HDR Candidate's thesis engages with the relevant literature and shows an advanced knowledge of research principles and methods relevant to the discipline;
- d. ensure the HDR Candidate's thesis makes a significant and original contribution to knowledge (PhD) or shows originality in the application of knowledge (Masters);
- e. evaluate whether the HDR Candidate's quality of writing meets the standard expected of a higher degree;
- f. provide independent written feedback about the HDR Candidate's readiness for examination by the expected date of submission;
- g. ensure that the HDR Candidate demonstrates that their research has been conducted in accordance with applicable policies and procedures;
- h. provide appropriate feedback to the HDR Candidate about the readiness (or otherwise) of the thesis for examination, providing feedback on any issues that need to be addressed prior to submission;
- i. ensure that the HDR Candidate has completed, where applicable, any required coursework units or training activities, as per their program requirements; and
- j. ensure that the Supervisor/s have begun to discuss and identify potential examiners, and are aware of any specific examination requirements pertaining to the candidate, such as joint or dual award arrangements, or where there is a performance or other component specific to the candidate's degree.

Part C - Milestone Review Panel

(34) The Milestone Review Panel is responsible for assessing and making determinations as to whether a HDR Candidate has met the relevant criteria to pass a milestone.

(35) Panel Membership will consist of:

- a. Chair, (Head of School or nominee, or the School HDR Coordinator);
- b. Principal Supervisor;
- c. Co-Supervisor(s);
- d. At least one suitably qualified discipline representative (who may be internal or external to the University) of the Candidate's disciplinary area nominated by the Principal Supervisor or Head of School (or nominee);
- e. The Panel may co-opt additional expertise as required.

Panel Meeting

(36) The meeting will provide the HDR Candidate with an opportunity to present an overview of their progress and to respond to questions from the panel.

(37) The HDR Candidate must have formal notice of the panel meeting. This notice shall include the day, time, location and membership of the Panel.

(38) As part of the milestone process the HDR Candidate is required to present written work and to undertake an oral presentation at an open forum.

(39) In exceptional circumstances, a HDR Candidate may request approval to present their milestone solely to a review panel rather than in a public forum.

(40) This request must be made at least two months prior to the scheduled milestone presentation. HDR Candidates

make the request by submitting a case and supporting documentation, including evidence of support from their Principal Supervisor to Chair of Milestone Review Panel.

(41) A HDR Candidate may request the rescheduling of the Panel if for any reason the Principal Supervisor is not able to attend.

(42) The panel meeting must provide the HDR Candidate and their supervisory team with an opportunity to discuss the HDR Candidate's professional development, research progress and other issues (if any) that needs to be addressed. The meeting also allows the HDR Candidate to address any questions raised by the panel and to receive verbal feedback on their progress.

(43) Both the HDR Candidate and Supervisors will have the opportunity to meet separately with the Chair and the Discipline representative for a confidential discussion as part of the meeting process.

Part D - Milestones Outcomes

(44) After reviewing the HDR Candidate's oral presentation, written component, and interview, and any input or additional submissions provided by the HDR Candidate and/or Supervisors, the Milestone Review Panel is to make a recommendation on whether the candidate has either met or not yet met the requirements of the milestone using the Milestone Report Form.

(45) The Milestone Report Form is to be signed by all parties and forwarded to the Graduate Research School within ten (10) working days of the final decision.

(46) The decisions available to the Milestone Review Panel are:

- a. Passed;
- b. Conditions (milestone is not achieved until certain conditions are met, with a specified timeline);
- c. HDR Candidate is asked to redo milestone;
- d. Milestone is not achieved and a recommendation is made by the relevant Chair to the Graduate Research School that candidature be terminated.

(47) The review panel can recommend a change of program. This option would be used in cases where the panel approves a transfer between degrees. The HDR Candidate must refer to the HDR Milestones Procedure to enact a transfer.

(48) The Chair will communicate the outcome to the HDR Candidate and Supervisory Team within ten (10) working days of the final decision being made.

(49) HDR Candidates who decline (including without acceptable explanation, failing to attend an induction or the Milestone Review Panel meeting) to engage with the milestone process at any time shall be deemed to have not met the milestone criteria and will be recommended for termination of candidature under Clause (46)(d).

Extension to Milestone

(50) HDR Candidates can apply for an extension to their milestone given extenuating circumstances as outlined in the Candidature Milestone Procedures.

(51) If an extension is granted future milestones will not move forward and it will not extend their period of candidature. Extensions to candidature are covered in the Candidature Management Policy.

(52) HDR Candidates who are undertaking mandatory coursework as part of their degree may be eligible for an extension for a milestone. In this instance candidates must refer to the Candidature Milestone Procedures.

Part E - Milestone Outcome Appeals

(53) Within ten (10) working days of receipt of the recommendation, the Graduate Research School will write to the HDR Candidate, with a copy to the School HDR Coordinator and Principal Supervisor, advising the Candidate of their rights of appeal, which will be:

- a. the decision of the Panel can be appealed to the relevant Associate Dean, Research;
- b. the decision of the Associate Dean, Research can be appealed to the Director, Graduate Research, whose determination will constitute the final institutional determination of the matter;
- c. appeal the NSW Ombudsman on matters of process only.

(54) In writing to appellants, the Graduate Research School will include a copy of the completed [Milestone Report Form](#), a summary of the reasons why this decision has been reached, any further option for appeal, and information about where to get advice and support.

(55) Once the final appeal has been processed, and where the HDR Candidate's appeal is unsuccessful, the Graduate Research School will terminate the HDR Candidate's candidature in the relevant Candidate administrative systems. The Graduate Research School will notify the HDR Candidate, Principal Supervisor and School HDR Coordinator in writing and, in the case of Candidate Visa Holders, notify UNE International.

(56) HDR Candidate Visa Holders must not have their candidature terminated until all avenues of appeal are exhausted.

Part F - Roles & Responsibilities

Dean, Graduate Research

(57) The Dean, Graduate Research is responsible for providing guidelines to manage milestone reviews. These guidelines specify the:

- a. configuration and membership of the Progress Review Panel (PRP), including appointing the Chair;
- b. format, scope, quality and amount of work submitted for each review;
- c. format, timing and duration of the review meeting and presentation (if required) for each review; and
- d. timing of written feedback provided by reviewer(s).

(58) The guidelines will be made available Graduate Research School website. The guidelines will also be communicated at a formal induction session for all commencing candidates.

Panel Chair

(59) The Chair provides academic oversight of the review process and provides a recommendation to the Dean, Graduate Research about attainment of the review.

(60) The Chair can also assume the role of a reviewer.

(61) The Chair should be a UNE staff member included on the Register of Supervisors and not be a member of the HDR Candidate's supervisory team.

(62) The Chair must hold a degree of a level equivalent to or greater than the program being undertaken by the HDR Candidate. When practical it is encouraged that the Chair would be appointed for the duration of candidature and should serve as the Chair on each milestone review of the HDR Candidate.

(63) The Chair will:

- a. consider the feedback provided by the supervisory team, HDR Candidate and other panel delegates(s);
- b. chair the review meeting and presentation (if required); and
- c. complete the Milestone Review Form and provide a Chair's report summarising the outcomes of the review and further work (if any) required by the HDR Candidate.

Discipline Representative

(64) One or more reviewers are nominated to provide an independent appraisal of the HDR Candidate's progress.

(65) A reviewer must not be a member of the HDR Candidate's advisory team and, where practical, drawn from the UNE community.

(66) In cases where this is not feasible (i.e. due to capacity or disciplinary norms) a reviewer may be external.

(67) The reviewer(s) will:

- a. attend the review meeting and presentation (if required); and
- b. provide feedback on the HDR Candidate's progress.

HDR Candidate

(68) The HDR Candidate will:

- a. submit candidature and project documents by allotted timeframes;
- b. nominate suitable times for a review meeting and presentation (if required);
- c. attend the milestone meeting and present their research (if required) at the scheduled time and location; and
- d. implement feedback in consultation with their advisory team.

Principal Supervisors

(69) Faculties will ensure that HDR Candidates receive appropriate support from their supervisory team prior to and during each progress review.

(70) The Principal Supervisor will:

- a. nominate a discipline representative(s);
- b. complete and submit their section of the Milestone Report Form to the Chair;
- c. review the HDR Candidate's work prior to submission to the Panel; and
- d. attend the review meeting and presentation (if required).

Part G - Reporting Information

(71) Data on HDR Candidate commencement, progression, monitoring and completion will be reported on bi-annually to the Research Committee and Graduate Research Committee.

Section 3 - Authority & Compliance

Authority

(72) The Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer (VC&CEO) pursuant to Section 29 of the [University of New England Act 1993 \(NSW\)](#), makes this University policy.

(73) The Dean, Graduate Research is authorised to make procedures and processes for the effective implementation and operation of this policy, and to publish as associated documents any tool that will assist with compliance.

(74) Policy Administrator for this policy is the Director Governance and University Secretary, who is authorised to make minor administrative updates to this policy.

Compliance

(75) UNE Representatives must observe this policy in relation to HDR Candidate progression and milestones requirements. Non-compliance may be a breach of the Code of Conduct and may be addressed under the disciplinary provisions of the relevant Enterprise Agreement.

(76) This policy is consistent with all legislative standards and regulatory frameworks, including the [Higher Education Support Act \(HESA\)](#), the [Higher Education Standards Framework \(HESF\)](#), the [Education Services for Overseas Students Act \(ESOS Act\)](#) and the [National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students](#). Further information regarding compliance obligations is available via the Compliance Register.

(77) This policy operates as and from the Effective Date. Previous policy on HDR Candidate progression and milestone requirements are replaced and have no further operation from the Effective Date.

(78) Notwithstanding the other provisions of this policy, the Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer may approve an exception to this policy where the Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer determines the application of this policy would otherwise lead to an unfair, unreasonable or absurd outcome. Approvals by the Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer under this clause must be documented in writing and must state the reason for the exception.

Section 4 - Quality Assurance

(79) The implementation of this Policy will be supported through the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research regularly monitoring and providing an annual report to the Research Committee and Academic Board on the operation of, and compliance with, this Policy.

Section 5 - Definitions (specific to this policy)

(80) FTE (Full-Time Equivalent)- means a HDR Candidate studying at a full-time capacity.

(81) Discipline Representative – a suitably qualified person (who may be internal or external to the University) of the Candidate's disciplinary area nominated by the Principal Supervisor or Head of School (or nominee).

Status and Details

Status	Current
Effective Date	7th February 2024
Review Date	7th February 2025
Approval Authority	Director Governance and University Secretary
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Expiry Date	To Be Advised
Unit Head	Chris Armstrong Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research
Enquiries Contact	Jane Stadler Dean, Graduate Research <hr/> Graduate Research School

Glossary Terms and Definitions

"UNE Representative" - Means a University employee (casual, fixed term and permanent), contractor, agent, appointee, UNE Council member, adjunct, visiting academic and any other person engaged by the University to undertake some activity for or on behalf of the University. It includes corporations and other bodies falling into one or more of these categories.

"Research" - Is the creation of new knowledge and/or the use of existing knowledge in a new and creative way so as to generate new concepts, methodologies, inventions and understandings. This could include synthesis and analysis of previous research to the extent that it is new and creative. (Defined by the Australian Research Council)

"Code of Conduct" - A document (variously referred to as a 'Code of Ethics', 'Code of Behaviour' and various other titles) broadly communicated within the entity setting out the entity's expected standards of behaviour.

"HDR Candidate" - Means a Higher Degree Research student.

"School" - Is an organisational unit comprising academic staff in related fields of study who are responsible for teaching and research in those academic fields together with support staff. Each School also has lead management for the design and delivery of the courses within its responsibility.

"Faculty" - An organisational unit consisting of a group of related Schools, which is responsible for coordinating the management and quality of the teaching and research conducted by those Schools.

"Principal Supervisor" - Means the UNE staff member or adjunct or honorary staff member who has principal responsibility for the research candidature of a HDR Student.

"School HDR Coordinator" - Means the Higher Degree Research (HDR) Coordinator in the School in which a HDR student is enrolled.