HDR Admission and Enrolment Procedure

Section 1 - Governing Policy

(1) This Procedure is governed by the Higher Degree by Research Policy.

Section 2 - Purpose

(2) The purpose of the HDR Admission and Enrolment Procedure (henceforth “the Procedure”) is to establish a clear, consistent and transparent framework for the admission, enrolment, and related decisions for Higher Degree by Research (HDR) programs, ensuring that applicants meet academic, research, and regulatory requirements and that the University has the capacity to support candidates to successful completion.

(3) Australian Catholic University (henceforth “ACU” or “the University”) is committed to maintaining a standard of excellence and integrity through the admissions and enrolment processes for Higher Degree Research (HDR) degrees.

(4) The Procedure ensures a consistent, fair, and transparent approach in line with ACU’s commitment to academic excellence and integrity and the Principles of Graduate Research Selection and Admissions as outlined by the Australian Council of Graduate Research.

Section 3 - Scope of Procedure

(5) The Procedure sets out the University’s requirements for candidate admission and re-admission to an HDR program and enrolment.

(6) This Procedure applies to all applicants seeking admission to an HDR program at the University, including current HDR candidates transferring from other institutions, and all University staff involved in the admissions process.

(7) The Procedure governs all aspects of the HDR admissions process, including eligibility assessment, application submission, evaluation, the issuance of offers and enrolment status (including full-time, part-time and external enrolment), commencement changes, transfers, and the rejection, cancellation or withdrawal of offers or enrolment

(8) This Procedure is to be read in conjunction with the Higher Degree by Research Policy and the Research Code of Conduct.

Section 4 - Admission to an HDR Program

Part A - Eligibility Criteria

(9) To be eligible for admission to an HDR program, the applicant must meet any program-specific admission requirements in the proposed area of study. This will consist of:

a. academic entry requirements;
b. demonstrated capacity to carry out independent research in the proposed area of study; and
c. English language proficiency.

(10) Selection is a competitive process and admission into a program is not guaranteed, even if applicants meet the minimum entry requirements.

(11) In addition to the eligibility requirements outlined in clauses 9 and 10 of the Procedure, admission to an HDR program is subject to the availability of appropriately qualified supervisors with the necessary supervisory expertise and capacity, University research facilities, and other resources required for the research project.

(12) In exercising its authority to admit applicants, the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research) must be satisfied that:

a. the applicant has the necessary prior training, a demonstrated ability to carry out independent research, and the academic ability to complete the proposed research project within the standard program duration.
b. Persons whose enrolment has been terminated as outlined in the HDR Candidate Management Procedure or HDR Progress Management Procedure cannot apply to be reinstated into the program in which the person was terminated. The person is also ineligible for admission to another HDR program at the University.

(13) The Pro-Vice Chancellor (Indigenous) has delegation in relation to Indigenous applicant admissions and will make recommendations to the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research).

(14) Research experience requirements for entry into HDR programs at the University are outlined in Guidance for Relevant Experience for Higher Degree by Research Admissions Assessment.

(15) In making its assessment under clauses 9 and 10 of this Procedure, or where an applicant's qualifications are issued by an international institution, the University will consider a combination of factors at their discretion, including but not limited to an applicant's:

a. academic record, including overall grade or GPA, and the mark or grade and extent of any research component completed as part of a study program;
b. thesis examiner reports (where available); coursework unit results; and the extent to which units relate to the acquisition of research skills;
c. research outputs that are relevant to the field; and/or
d. relevant professional, research, or clinical experience.

Part B - Admission to Doctor of Philosophy or Doctor of Ministry

(16) The minimum qualifications for admission into the Doctor of Philosophy or the Doctor of Ministry are:

a. An Australian undergraduate degree with Honours (Australian Qualifications Framework [AQF] level 8) at a minimum level of Second Class Division A (Distinction average) or international equivalent; or
b. A Master's degree by research (Distinction average) successfully completed in a relevant field; or
c. A Master's degree by coursework (Distinction average) with appropriate research training including a substantial component of original research, successfully completed in a relevant field; or
d. A qualification equivalent to AQF level 8 or 9 completed to at least distinction average with appropriate research training including a substantial component of original research in a relevant field; or
e. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants with professional experience or cultural expertise in Indigenous Knowledges or kinship connections and who demonstrate capacity to undertake an independent research project on Indigenous Knowledges; or

f. a qualification, or combination of qualifications and relevant professional experience demonstrating research training equivalent to at least a distinction average AQF level 8 or 9 and the capacity to undertake an independent research project.
g. The provisions of the Academic Regulations apply in relation to any application for credit towards a coursework component of a research higher degree.

Part C - Admission to Master of Philosophy

(17) minimum qualifications for admission into a Master of Philosophy program are:

a. An Australian undergraduate degree with Honours (AQF level 8) at a minimum level of Second Class Division A (Distinction average) or international equivalent; or
b. A Master's degree by research (Distinction average) successfully completed in a relevant field; or
c. A Master's degree by coursework (Distinction average) with appropriate research training including a substantial component of original research, successfully completed in a relevant field; or
d. A qualification equivalent to AQF level 8 or 9 completed to at least distinction average with appropriate research training including a substantial component of original research in a relevant field; or
e. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants with professional experience or cultural expertise in Indigenous Knowledges or kinship connections and who demonstrate capacity to undertake an independent research project on Indigenous Knowledges; or
f. a qualification, or combination of qualifications and relevant professional experience demonstrating research training equivalent to at least distinction average AQF level 8 or 9 and capacity to undertake an independent research project.

Part D - English Language Requirements

(18) Full documentary evidence in support of English Language Proficiency (ELP) must be submitted with applications for admission and scholarship. The University reserves the right to seek further documentary evidence of ELP.

(19) Where an applicant's first language is not English, the minimum ELP requirements for entry to HDR programs may be met if the applicant demonstrates satisfaction of:

a. successful completion of a tertiary course of a study with a minimum duration of two years full-time and in accordance with any requirements specified in the English language proficiency guidelines; or
b. achievement of minimum scores on a recognised English test as specified in the English language proficiency guidelines. The English test must be completed within two years prior to the proposed course commencement date and remain valid up to and including the actual enrolment date.

Part E - Application Process

(20) Applicants to HDR programs must submit their applications according to the prescribed process, timeline, and format, and inclusive of the supporting documentation, as specified in the guidance on how to apply.

(21) Assessment of applications will be undertaken by the University in accordance with the steps outlined in guidance on how to apply.

Part F - Candidates Transferring from other Institutions

(22) Currently enrolled HDR candidates at other institutions may apply to transfer to an equivalent University program. Applicants will only be accepted to transfer into a University HDR program if they have sufficient candidature

remaining and where the minimum of 12 months enrolment EFT is available in the remaining program duration.

(23) Applicants should discuss the program requirements with their proposed University supervisor and Faculty Associate Dean of Research (ADR) before commencing the program transfer process.

(24) Applicants seeking to transfer to a University HDR program must meet the admission requirements set out in Part A of this Procedure and are required to provide:

a. evidence that they are performing at an appropriate level in their current HDR program; and
b. documents to support the application for prior candidature which confirm their current enrolment status, thesis title, program duration, start and end dates, former and current supervisors, evidence of satisfactory progress (e.g., milestone reports), and any approved leave.

(25) A candidate transferring into a University HDR program agrees to undertake the requirements of the program they are transferring into, unless credit or recognition of prior learning, or prior candidature has been granted toward program requirements.

(26) A candidate can only transfer to the same AQF level program and a transfer will only be approved where the candidate is actively enrolled at the institution that they are transferring from, i.e. they have not submitted their thesis for examination or have already completed degree requirements.

(27) The program duration may be reduced for applicants who have previously been enrolled in a HDR program for the same, or substantially similar, research project. Prior candidature will not apply in circumstances where the prior and proposed research project substantially differs.

(28) The period of prior candidature deducted from the standard program duration will be equal to the total period of enrolment in the previous degree, minus any periods of approved leave.

(29) Progress management milestone dates and the Thesis Submission Date will be scheduled to reflect any change to program duration resulting from the deduction of prior candidature.

(30) An international student covered by and subject to ESOS requirements can only transfer to another Australian CRICOS-registered provider within the first six months of their main course if they receive an approved release (or a new Confirmation of Enrolment). For more information about ESOS obligations, visit the Australian Government's Study Australia website.

Part G - Notification of Outcome

(31) An offer of admission may be issued where the relevant Faculty has reviewed the application and supporting documentation and determined that the availability of appropriately qualified supervisors (with the necessary supervisory expertise and capacity), research facilities and other resources are available to support the research project and applicant; and where the Faculty and the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Research (or delegate) are satisfied that an applicant meets all eligibility and academic entry requirements.

(32) Conditions may be applied to an offer in circumstances deemed appropriate. The specified condition(s) must be met at the relevant point as outlined in the offer of admission. An offer will be withdrawn if the condition(s) is/are not met.

(33) Prior to commencement, a Higher Degree Research student may be required to enter into an agreement concerning intellectual property (IP) rights. Intellectual Property matters are governed by ACU's Intellectual Property Policy. The offer of admission will be valid for 6 months. The offer will lapse if the applicant has not enrolled or sought an extension to the commencement date by the date specified in the offer of admission.

(34) An offer of admission to an HDR program may include a requirement for the candidate to complete discipline-specific skills training, in addition to the research component of the program.

(35) Only those staff members with a formal delegation from the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Research or the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Global and Education Pathways) can issue offers of admission to a HDR program.

(36) Decisions relating to admission are final and are not subject to appeal, except where the applicant can demonstrate that the decision was affected by a material procedural error or the application of incorrect or misleading information.

Part H - Enrolment

(37) HDR candidates are enrolled by the Graduate Research School.

(38) An applicant may be enrolled full-time or part-time as outlined in their offer of admission, noting that international candidates located in Australia must undertake full-time enrolment.

(39) Full-time enrolment status is the equivalent of a standard five-day working week, usually between the hours of 9:00am to 5:00pm Monday to Friday for at least 48 weeks per year, with public holidays excepted.

(40) The actual pattern of research and study may vary depending on the candidate's personal circumstances and other commitments.

(41) Part-time enrolment status is equivalent to 50% of the timeframe outlined in clause 39.

(42) A candidate is expected to be located at an ACU campus, or other location outlined in their offer of admission, for their research and study, unless they are approved as external.

Part I - External (Off-Campus) Enrolment

(43) External enrolment can only be approved by the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Research (or delegate) upon receiving endorsement from the Faculty where the following requirements are met:

a. the program has been approved to offer external enrolment;
b. the program allows for external enrolment at the HDR candidate's stage of enrolment in the program;
c. the HDR candidate will have access to the research facilities and resources required to successfully undertake their research project, including appropriate supervisory arrangements, for the full duration of their external enrolment; and
d. where the candidate's research involves a third party:
    - the candidate will be provided with the supervision and induction necessary for their project to be conducted.,
    - the candidate is provided with training in relevant emergency, safety and evacuation procedures where required, and they have access to counselling and other appropriate ancillary support services; and
    - an agreement is in place prior to the candidate commencing at their place of external enrolment.

(44) External enrolment will not be approved in the following circumstances:

a. the intended off-campus research location is within daily commuting distance of the campus of enrolment, other than in exceptional circumstances;
b. for international students subject to Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) requirements, other than

being considered in compassionate and compelling circumstances; or

c. the course does not permit external enrolment (refer to the University Handbook for course specific information).

Part J - Change of Commencement Date

(45) Applicants may apply to change their program commencement date on the condition that their request is submitted prior to the program commencement date specified in the offer of admission.

(46) The Pro Vice-Chancellor, Research (or delegate) is responsible for approving requests to change the course commencement date, following advice from the relevant school or institute.

(47) The Pro Vice-Chancellor, Research (or delegate) may refuse a change in commencement date request if:

a. the candidate is seeking to defer commencement for the purpose of studying elsewhere;
b. a change of commencement date would impact on a scholarship held by, or offered to, the applicant;
c. the University would be unable to provide adequate supervision or research facilities due to a change of commencement date; or
d. the maximum deferral period will be exceeded

(48) The maximum deferral period of the program commencement date is 12 months from the commencement date specified in the offer.

Part K - Rejection of Application, Cancellation of Offer or Enrolment

(49) The Pro Vice-Chancellor, Research (or delegate) may reject an application, or cancel an offer of admission or a candidate's enrolment if:

a. the applicant has not satisfactorily demonstrated the eligibility requirements under Part A of the Procedure;
b. the applicant has previously been suspended or excluded from the University or another educational institution;
c. admitting or enrolling the applicant may place the University in breach of a law or other legal requirement;
d. the applicant is found to have falsified information that would otherwise have led to their application being rejected;
e. the applicant failed to disclose information that would have led to their application being rejected;
f. the applicant fails to respond, or commence, in accordance with the offer, in which case the offer will be lapsed and withdrawn and such offers will not be reinstated; or
g. the Faculty advises that it does not have sufficient resources or supervisory expertise to support the candidate's proposed research project to completion.

Part L - Enrolment Requirements

Personal Details

(50) At enrolment, a candidate must ensure that their personal and enrolment information is accurate and up to date, and promptly update the University of any changes.

(51) A candidate is required to maintain accurate and up-to-date personal and contact details at all times, including during periods of leave, fieldwork, or study away.

Communication

(52) Access to and monitoring of the University-issued student email account is a condition of enrolment. Students are responsible for regularly checking their ACU student email account for official correspondence. Failure to read or act on communications sent to the ACU student email account will not be grounds for waiver, special consideration, or appeal.

Mandatory Modules

(53) A candidate is required to complete all mandatory training modules, such as HDR orientation and Respect and Safety modules, within the prescribed timeframe. Information regarding mandatory requirements and access arrangements will be provided upon initial enrolment and updated as additional requirements arise during the period of candidature.

Tuition Fees

(54) A candidate is required to pay all prescribed fees, levies and/or charges by the deadlines set by the University, as outlined in the course agreement, offer letter and other University correspondence.

(55) Failure to pay prescribed fees by the applicable deadlines may result in a financial hold on the candidate's record, restricting access to University resources and preventing progression to examination.

(56) Ongoing non-payment of fees may result in the cancellation of enrolment.

(57) For international HDR candidates non-payment of fees may affect the University's capacity to confirm the candidate's enrolment in accordance with its obligations under ESOS legislation.

Unique Student Identifier

(58) In accordance with Australian Government requirements, all students undertaking study in Australia must obtain a Unique Student Identifier (USI), which is a unique, lifelong education identifier linked to a student's record of nationally recognised education and training undertaken in Australia; the USI is distinct from the student identification number issued by Australian Catholic University. A candidate must provide their USI to the University through the relevant ACU student administration system in accordance with University requirements and applicable legislation.

Concurrent Enrolment

(59) A full-time candidate enrolled in a research higher degree may not normally enrol or remain enrolled in any other academic program at ACU or any other institution.

(60) Exceptions to clause (59) include:

a. where an ACU staff member enrolled in a doctoral program is required to undertake the Graduate Certificate in Higher Education (GCHE) as part of their probation criteri Under such circumstances, the staff member may be granted a six-month suspension of candidature to study the GCHE. This period is in addition to the twelve-month suspension of candidature allowed within the candidature; and
b. where a candidate is also enrolled in the Master of Psychology (Clinical) or the Master of Psychology (Educational and Developmental).

Part M - Withdrawal and Readmission

Withdrawal from Enrolment

(61) A candidate is responsible for seeking the advice from their Principal Supervisor and Faculty Associate Dean, Research prior to submitting a request to withdraw from enrolment.

(62) A candidate may withdraw from enrolment at any time prior to the submission of the thesis for examination.

(63) A candidate who has submitted their thesis for examination cannot withdraw from enrolment.

(64) A candidate must inform the Graduate Research School of their withdrawal via the prescribed process.

Readmission after Withdrawal from ACU

(65) A candidate wishing to be readmitted following withdrawal from ACU must make written application to the Faculty Associate Dean, Research within two years of the date of the withdrawal.

(66) The Faculty Associate Dean, Research may recommend readmission to the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Research (or delegate) after taking into account:

a. the reasons for withdrawal and the standing of the candidate at the time of withdrawal;
b. the time consumed thus far in candidature; and
c. whether the research and the thesis can retain academic currency and be satisfactorily completed within the time remaining to the candidate.

(67) If the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Research (or delegate) approves the reinstatement of enrolment, the commencement of candidature will be the date of the original enrolment, and the total period remaining in the candidature will be the duration of the degree minus the period of original enrolment.

Section 5 - Further Assistance

(68) Any questions relating to the Procedure as outlined in this document can be directed to:

a. Your Principal Supervisor
b. The Faculty HDR Office:
    i. Faculty of Education and Arts: FEA.HDR@acu.edu.au
    ii. Faculty of Health Sciences: FHS.ADR@acu.edu.au
    iii. Faculty of Law and Business: FLB.HDR@acu.edu.au
    iv. Faculty of Theology and Philosophy: ADRes.FTP@acu.edu.au
c. The Graduate Research School: Grad.Research@acu.edu.au

Section 6 - Monitoring and Review

(69) The URC is responsible for the administration of HDR programs, subject to the general supervision of the Academic Board.

(70) The Chair of the URC may act executively out-of-session on behalf of the Committee, subject to any action being reported to the URC at its next meeting.

(71) The URC will report regularly to the Academic Board and make recommendations on the award of HDR programs directly to the Board.

(72) The Graduate Research School will monitor compliance through annual audits of HDR processes, reviews of milestone tracking data, and periodic reporting from Faculties. Identified issues will be reported to the URC and corrective actions will be implemented where necessary.

(73) The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research) will ensure the Procedure aligns with the University's policies and external regulatory requirements.

(74) Comprehensive reviews of HDR programs are normally conducted every five (5) years but no later than seven (7) years. The reviews are informed by:

a. recommendations from panels convened for the purpose by the Director, Graduate Research School;
b. external referencing of the success of HDR candidate cohorts and HDR candidate satisfaction against comparable programs;
c. strategic priorities of the University; and
d. the results of regular interim monitoring.

Section 7 - Definitions

Term	Definition
Associate Dean of Research (ADR)	Faculty-level academic responsible for research and HDR matters within their faculty.
Australian Qualification Framework (AQF)	National policy defining the standards for educational qualifications in Australia.
English Language Proficiency (ELP)	Requirement that non-native English speakers demonstrate adequate language ability via approved methods (e.g., standardised tests).
Graduate Research School	Located within the ODVCRE, it is responsible for administering the candidate life-cycle requirements of Higher Degrees by Research candidates.
Higher Degree by Research (HDR)	Is a degree which meets the specifications of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). It includes Doctoral degrees (AQF Level 10) and Master's (Research) degrees (AQF Level 9). It excludes Master's (coursework) degrees and Bachelor Honours degrees.
Pro Vice-Chancellor, Research	Senior university leader responsible for oversight of research training and HDR admissions.
Recognition of Prior Learning	The formal process of recognising previous study or experience as fulfilling program requirements within an HDR program.
Prior candidature	The total amount of full-time equivalent research completed in a previous degree when an applicant transfers to another graduate research course in the same research area.

Status and Details

Status	Future
Effective Date	1st January 2027
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Approval Date	17th November 2026
Expiry Date	Not Applicable
Responsible Executive	Abid Khan Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Enterprise)
Responsible Manager	Michelle Lopez Director, Graduate Research School
Enquiries Contact	Michelle Lopez Director, Graduate Research School