Edith Cowan University
Graduate Research

GUIDELINES

Guideline Title: Higher Degree by Research (HDR) Milestone Requirements

Guideline Owner: Dean, Graduate Research

This guideline supports the University to operationalise the *Research Training Policy* and must be complied with.

1. INTENT

This guideline HDR Milestone requirements and the roles and responsibilities of the Candidates, Supervisors, and the University.

2. ORGANISATIONAL SCOPE

This guideline applies to all Staff, Candidates and Supervisors involved in any aspect of Higher Degrees by Research (HDR) including adjunct positions and emeritus professors that administer, supervise, or otherwise contribute to HDR Candidates and HDR Courses.

3. DEFINITIONS

The University Glossary and definitions in the Research Training Policy apply to this guideline.

4. GUIDELINE CONTENT

Milestone 1: Induction Milestone

4.1. The purpose of Milestone 1 is to familiarise Candidates with their course, and relevant University, state, national or other legislative requirements. The milestone will ensure the Candidate is aware of the support and training available in the University and their responsibilities and requirements within their course.

4.2. Candidates must familiarise themselves with the University's *Admissions, Enrolment and Academic Progress Rules*, Conducting Research with Integrity policy, these Guidelines and any state, national or legislative requirements relevant to their research.

4.3. The University's values of Integrity, Respect, Rational Inquiry, Personal Excellence and Courage underpin the University's strong commitment to Academic and Research Integrity. Candidates are required to be aware of their responsibilities in upholding these values as outlined in the Code of Conduct. Failing to adhere to these values can have significant consequences, including the exclusion from the course. Candidates are required to be aware of their responsibilities regarding Code of Conduct, *Academic Integrity* and the *Academic Misconduct Rules*.

4.4. Candidates are required to successfully complete the following to achieve Milestone 1 (*minimum requirements*):

   a.   Graduate Research Induction Program (GRIP)
   b.   ECU Work Health and Safety Induction
   c.   HDR Candidate and Supervisor Agreement
   d.   Skill and Knowledge Audit (MyPLAN)
   e.   Research Integrity Professional Learning (RIPL) module on the University's Learning Management System
   f.   Obtain an ORCID ID and connect it to the University via ECU-ORCID Connect.

4.5. Candidates have a duty to take reasonable care of their own health and safety and must ensure they extend reasonable care that their acts or omissions do not adversely affect the health and safety of other persons, including research participants. Candidates must comply, as far as they are reasonably able, with the ECU Health and Safety policy any other health and safety instructions provided by the University.

4.6. Candidates, in consultation with their Supervisors, are required to complete the HDR Candidate and Supervisor Agreement and the HDR Skills and Knowledge Audit. These documents outline roles, responsibilities and expectations of Supervisors and Candidates within the project and broader research training and education. This will include an overview on deliverables and oversight, workshops and professional development, meeting schedules and feedback, and dispute resolution. Additional supporting documentation that may assist in the completion of these documents is provided within the guidance notes and Best Practice Principles provided by the Australian Research Council and the Australian Council for Graduate Research.

4.7. Completion of requirements for Milestone 1 will be assessed by the Principal Supervisor. Candidate must submit the approved Milestone 1 form via the University's Prescribed Process for recording on the Candidate's record.

Milestone 2: Research Proposal Milestone

4.8. The purpose of Milestone 2 is to ensure that the proposed research is feasible, of a quality expected of the degree, assessed for academic/research merit, and matched to the

Candidate's abilities and the School's/University's resources. The milestone will ensure that risks associated with the project have been appropriately identified and managed. The milestone will also ensure the Candidate can appropriately communicate their proposed research both verbally and in writing and has completed the appropriate training to commence data collection.

4.9.   Candidates are required to successfully complete or achieve the following in this milestone (*minimum requirements*):

    a.   written research proposal (submitted to Turnitin); and
    b.   oral presentation.

4.10.   Written Research Proposal

    a.   Candidates are required to write a research proposal which is typically limited to 10,000 words for a Doctoral Candidate and 7,000 words for a Masters by Research Candidate. It is expected that in most cases the proposal will include, at a minimum, an introduction to the current literature relevant to the topic, methods and materials within the project, ethical considerations, references, timeline, budget and any additional important considerations, such as confidentiality, risk or other relevant matters.

    b.   Candidates undertaking creative research may require a modified framework and should consult with their Supervisor and Associate Dean (Research).

More details on the written proposal can be found on the [Research Journey Webpage](#), and Candidates should consult with their Supervisor for additional support and guidance.

4.11.   Proposal Reviewers

    a.   The written research proposal is required to be reviewed by a minimum of two Proposal Reviewers (Reviewers) approved by the relevant Associate Dean (Research). Reviewers must assess if the project is conceptually and methodologically sound, has an appropriate scope for the level of award, relates to research that is considered significant (to the discipline and to the broader community), and if the research can reasonably be expected to make an original contribution to knowledge. Ideally, the Reviewers will provide a written report to the School prior to the oral proposal presentation.

    b.   The [Nomination of Reviewers form](#) is required to be submitted for review and approval at least 3 weeks prior to the submission of the written research proposal. Reviewers are nominated by the Principal Supervisor and approved by the Associate Dean (Research). Candidates may be involved in discussions with their Supervisor Panel on the selection of appropriate reviewers.

    c.   Reviewers may be either internal or external to the University. Reviewers should have academic qualifications equivalent to or above the level of degree they are assessing. If a Reviewer does not have the appropriate qualifications, it must be determined whether it is suitable to include them as a Reviewer, based their

experience which must be judged, by the relevant Associate Dean (Research), to be equivalent or higher.

    d.   It is expected that Supervisors will ensure Reviewers are willing to review the proposal prior to submission of the nomination form. Candidates and Supervisors are required to declare any potential, real, or perceived conflict of interest upon the nomination of reviewers. The Associate Dean (Research) will consider any potential, real or perceived conflict of interest when approving reviewers.

    e.   A Reviewer may be nominated as a thesis examiner at a later date for the same research Candidate if they also meet the nomination of examiner requirements.

    f.   The written proposal should be submitted to the relevant individual within the School (i.e. School Officer or HDR Course Coordinator) at least 14 days prior to their oral proposal presentation to allow reviewers to review the proposal prior to observing the presentation.

4.12.   Oral Presentation

    a.   Candidates are required to present their proposed research in an oral presentation.

    b.   The oral presentation should normally be advertised to academics within the relevant School or Teaching Area prior to the presentation. On campus Candidates will typically present the proposal in person, whereas off-campus/online Candidates may be required to present online.

    c.   The oral proposal presentation must be chaired by an ECU Academic Staff member (e.g., HDR Course Coordinator, Associate Dean (Research), or other relevant Academic Staff member), that is free from conflict of interest with the project and Candidate.

    d.   The length of the oral proposal presentation should be confirmed with the Supervisor to ensure it meets disciplinary expectations, however, in general presentations are approximately 20-30 minutes, followed by questions/comments. Questions and comments raised during the oral proposal presentation should be noted by the Supervisors. In cases where reviewers are not present at the oral presentation, the Chair may also raise any questions or concerns provided in the reviewers' written reports.

    e.   Immediately following the oral presentation, the Chair will convene a meeting with the Reviewers (of the Written Research Proposal) and Supervisors to provide an overall recommendation of the research proposal to the Dean, Graduate Research. The outcomes of the proposal will be one of the following:

- Recommend to proceed, subject to any minor amendments to the approval of the Principal Supervisor;
- Recommend to proceed, subject to major amendments being made to the satisfaction of the Associate Dean (Research);
- Recommend to revise and resubmit to reviewers, which will require the Candidate to undertake their oral proposal presentation again (in this regard, this section 4.25 will apply to the resubmission); or
- Recommend not to proceed, noting this will result in the Candidate failing to meet the requirements of Milestone 2 and being excluded from the course.

The Chair will then ask the Candidate to return to hear the outcome recommendation, and provide a brief overview of the verbal discussion. The Chair will send completed written reports to the Candidate and their Supervisors within two days of the oral presentation.

If amendments to the proposal are not completed to the satisfaction of the Principal Supervisor or Associate Dean (Research) as outlined above, the Candidate will fail to meet the requirements of Milestone 2 and will be excluded from the course.

4.13. Completion of requirements for Milestone 2 will be assessed by the Principal Supervisor. Candidate must submit the approved Milestone 2 form via the University's Prescribed Process for recording on the Candidate's record.

Milestone 3: Ethics and Governance Approvals

4.14. The purpose of Milestone 3 is to ensure Candidates obtain appropriate relevant ethics and governance approval for their proposed research.

4.15. Candidates are required to achieve approval of the following in this milestone (*minimum requirements*):

   a.   Ethics Approval; and
   b.   Risk Assessment.

4.16. In addition to those requirements above, Candidates may have additional governance or ethical requirements, particularly for projects involving overseas, or multi-institutional research. This may include an international compliance review or other requirements.

4.17. Ethics Approval

   a.   Candidates must not commence research until they have complied with the University's ethics requirements, as well as any relevant state or national legislation in Australia or elsewhere.
   b.   All HDR Candidate projects are required to be reviewed in the University's Research Ethics Management System (REMS) before commencing research.
   c.   There are two stages to this process.
   •   The first stage identifies the level of ethical review required. This is determined by completing the Proportional Review Checklist (PRC) through REMS.
   •   The second stage requires the completion of the full ethics application form for review by the relevant committee.
   d.   Candidates must obtain appropriate ethics approval prior to commencing participant recruitment or data collection. Depending on the project, Candidates may be required to obtain ethics or governance approvals from external organisations prior to commencing participant recruitment or data collection, such as a Joint PhD or collaborative projects. It is also important to note that obtaining research ethics approval is not a single process, and that despite achieving Milestone 3, Candidates will require ongoing review, reporting, and management of their project to ensure it continues to meet ethics requirements. This will be in the

form of annual reports, amendments addressing any changes to participant recruitment or research procedures, the reporting of any adverse events, and any other matters deemed appropriate by the Supervisor Panel. Candidates should complete an application for ethics approval in collaboration with their Supervisor. Further information can be found on the Ethics Webpage.

e. Ethics and research governance review procedures in Milestone 3 are separate from, but related to, the academic review in Milestone 2. As such, Milestone 3 may be completed concurrently with the proposal development, yet research cannot commence until both Milestone 2 and 3 have been achieved.

f. Retrospective ethics approval cannot be granted. Any data or research conducted without appropriate approval cannot be used in the thesis, and may be a breach of the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and the University's Academic Integrity Policy.

The Research Ethics Team will notify the Candidate, Supervisors, Student Administration, and Graduate Research Services by email when ethics approval has been approved for recording on the Candidate's record.

4.18. Risk Assessment

a. Candidates must ensure they are familiar with the University's Work Health and Safety management system and that the foundations of their research project and activity(s) are based on health and safety hazard risk assessment and management practices. Candidates must have appropriate approvals for their activity prior to the research commencing.

b. To complete Milestone 3 Candidates must:

- Complete a Health and Safety Hazard Risk Assessment for any relevant research project activities and gain any other required approvals such as Radiation, Biosafety and Hazardous Substances (RBHS) or Fieldtrip, Event or Travel approval.

- Continue to ensure hazards, incidents, and near misses, related to their research are reported to the Research Supervisor who will record and investigate them.

c. Candidates are required to complete a Work Health and Safety Risk Assessment for their research project using the University's Prescribed Processes and software. This risk assessment is in addition to any assessment of risk completed within the research ethics review process (Milestone 3). Candidates undertaking research involving any radiation, biosafety or hazardous substances will also be required to gain approval from the relevant committee.

d. Depending upon the project, Candidates may also be required to complete a risk assessment for other general/enterprise risks. More details on completion of the Risk Assessment are available on the Research Journey Website. Candidates involved in activities or research with industry or partnering institutions, including placements, are required to be familiar with and adhere to any Work Health and Safety requirements of the collaborating organisation.

The ethics application and risk assessment will be reviewed by the relevant committee or individual, depending on the project and level of risk identified.

4.19. Completion of requirements for Milestone 3 will be assessed by the Principal Supervisor. Candidate must submit the approved Milestone 3 form via the University's Prescribed Process for recording on the Candidate's record.

Milestone 4: Mid-Candidature Milestone

4.20. The purpose of Milestone 4 is to determine whether the Candidate has made satisfactory progress towards completing their Course and is appropriately supported to complete their research. The milestone ensures Candidates have:

   a.   communicated their research verbally or publicly;
   b.   completed a substantial body of written work;
   c.   progressed their career and professional development adequately; and
   d.   identified support, education, and training that may be required by the Candidate to complete the degree and enhance their future employability.

4.21. Candidates are required to complete the following in this milestone (*minimum requirements*):

   a.   Overview of research progress (300 word maximum);
   b.   Evidence of completed written work;
   c.   Evidence of oral or public communication of research; and
   d.   Thesis format or publication plan.

4.22. Candidates are required to provide a written overview of their research progress to date. This written report is to be provided in the application form and must demonstrate that data collection for the thesis has commenced. Candidates must also provide a substantial body of written work. This body of written work may include a draft of a thesis chapter, literature review, peer reviewed manuscript, documentation of studio rehearsals/experiments, primary journal data/reflections, or other as determined by Supervisors and approved by the relevant Associate Dean (Research). Candidates are also required to provide evidence for the oral or public communication of their research. This communication may include a research seminar, conference presentation, creative performance, media engagement, public performance, public workshop, or other relevant communication activity approved by the Associate Dean (Research).

4.23. Progression meeting

   a.   The Application for Milestone 4 will be reviewed by the relevant School Associate Dean (Research). In cases where the overview of progression is of concern, Candidates will be required to meet with a HDR Progression Committee. The HDR Progression Committee will be comprised of, at a minimum:
   •   the relevant Associate Dean (Research);
   •   the Principal Supervisor; and
   •   at least one independent Academic Staff member within the University.

b. This committee will review the Application and supporting documentation for Milestone 4 and meet with the Candidate to discuss the Candidate's progression, professional development, and other relevant matters.

c. The outcomes of this meeting will be one of the following:

- progression is satisfactory;
- progression has not been satisfactory and there are tasks or activities that the Candidate is required to meet to the satisfaction of the Principal Supervisor;
- progression has not been satisfactory and there are tasks or activities that the Candidate is required to meet to the satisfaction of the Associate Dean (Research);
- progression has not been satisfactory and requirements of the milestone have not been met, noting this will result in the Candidate being excluded from the course;
- The HDR Progression Committee were unable to agree on an outcome and the matter will be forwarded to the Dean, Graduate Research for determination. The Dean, Graduate Research, in determining an outcome, choose to gain further information from any internal or external persons with relevant expertise to the work.

4.24. Completion of requirements for Milestone 4 will be assessed by the Principal Supervisor. Candidate must submit the approved Milestone 4 form via the University's Prescribed Process for recording on the Candidate's record.

Milestone 5: Thesis Submission

4.25. The purpose of Milestone 5 is the examination of the Candidates thesis which is important to ensure that the Candidate meets the requirements of the relevant Award.

4.26. Candidates are required to achieve approval of the following in this milestone (*minimum requirements*):

a. Nomination of Examiners.
b. Written thesis/exegesis submission.
c. Oral examination, if relevant (required for all Candidates enrolled from 2018 onwards).

Details on the thesis submission and thesis examination are provided within the Thesis Examination Guideline and Research Journey Webpage.

Milestone 6: Thesis/Course Completion

4.27. The purpose of Milestone 6 is to finalise post-examination requirements of a Candidate's thesis prior to completion of the Award.

4.28. Following thesis examination Candidates are often required to amend the thesis based upon recommendations made by examiners. The time provided to the Candidate to address

recommended changes and approval for amendments are outlined in the Guideline: HDR Thesis Examination.

4.29.   The extent of the changes or amendments required will depend upon the thesis grade awarded. Details on the thesis examination are provided within the Guideline: HDR Thesis Examination and Research Journey Webpage.

Maximum timeframes

4.30.   Below are the maximum timeframes for each HDR course following full time commencement of the degree (or part time equivalent). **The timeframes for Milestones 1 to 5 inclusive are calculated from the date of Course commencement.** The timeframes are based on full-time study and will be reckoned for Candidates who are approved to study part-time based on the total number of Effective Full-Time Days (EFTD) enrolled:

Milestone	Masters by Research (course duration 1.5 years FTE)	Masters by Research (course duration 2 years FTE)	Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)	Integrated Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
Milestone 1: Induction	2 months	2 months	2 months	2 months
Milestone 2: Research Proposal	6 months	6 months	6 months	12 months
Milestone 3: Ethics and Governance Approvals	8 months	10 months	12 months	18 months
Milestone 4: Mid-Candidature Milestone	9 months	12 months	24 months	24 months
Milestone 5: Thesis Submission (does not include a period of re-submission)	18 months	24 months	48 months	48 months
Milestone 6: Thesis/ Course Completion	As outlined in HDR Thesis Examination Guideline	As outlined in HDR Thesis Examination Guideline	As outlined in HDR Thesis Examination Guideline	As outlined in HDR Thesis Examination Guideline

4.31.   Candidates who do not complete the milestone requirements within time (subject to any granted extensions), will be placed on a purple Progression Status and excluded from the Course.

Extensions to milestones

4.32.   Candidates may be eligible for a milestone extension in Exceptional Circumstances. Normal occupational commitments and extracurricular activities are not accepted as grounds for granting an extension.

4.33. Candidates seeking a milestone extension must apply using the University's Prescribed Process at least 14 days prior to the due date of the milestone.

4.34. Extensions to milestones are not guaranteed and will be considered by the relevant Associate Dean (Research) on a case-by-case basis. Each extension will be for a maximum of 6 months regardless of enrolment load.

4.35. For milestone 1,2,3 and 4 Candidates will be permitted only two extensions during any one milestone, and up to three extensions over the entire enrolment/ candidature.

4.36. Where a Candidate has been granted a milestone extension, they will not be permitted to subsequently have their enrolment in the relevant Course intermitted during the extension period, unless the Associate Dean (Research) determines otherwise.

4.37. A Candidate who receives a milestone extension will be required to enter a Progression Plan. A Candidate who receives a Milestone extension who is already subject to a Progression Plan, will be required to enter a new revised Progression Plan.

Joint, Collaboration Course or HDR Candidate transferring to ECU

4.38. Course learning outcomes within HDR Courses are aligned with HDR milestone requirements. It is therefore a requirement that all Candidates enrolled into all HDR courses complete the requirements within each of the milestones outlined, including joint, collaborative courses, or Candidates transferring to ECU midway throughout their research degree.

4.39. The completion and recording of milestones in joint HDR courses are outlined within Guideline 5: Off-campus, industry-engagement, and joint HDR programs.

4.40. HDR Candidates enrolling into a HDR Course at ECU midway through their degree are required to provide evidence of meeting each of the relevant prior milestones as part of their Course enrolment. The Coordinator, Research Student Support will contact the Candidate, Supervisors, and the relevant Associate Dean (Research) to ensure the requirements of each prior milestone are recorded within the Candidate's record. The relevant forms for each milestone will need to be completed and may need to be accompanied by official verification or evidence of attainment at the prior institution, where relevant. The relevant Associate Dean (Research) will be responsible for determining whether the relevant Milestones have been met prior to Course enrolment.

Appeal

4.41. A Candidate may apply for a review or appeal if dissatisfied with the assessment of their academic work or progress as per the *Admission, Enrolment and Academic Progress Rules*.

5.   ACCOUNTABILITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Guideline Owner is the *Dean, Graduate Research* and has overall responsibility for the content of these guidelines and their operation.

The *Manager, Graduate Research Services* is responsible for currency of information and provision of advice relating to these guidelines.

6.   RELATED DOCUMENTS

Rules

Academic Integrity
Academic Misconduct
Admission, Enrolment and Academic Progress

Policies

Research Training

Operational documents and resources

Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research
Australian Council for Graduate Research
Australian Research Council
Code of Conduct
ECU-ORCID Connect
ECU SOAR Centre
Forms, Policies and Guidelines
Guideline: HDR Milestones
Guideline: HDR Thesis Examination
Guideline: Off-campus, industry-engagement, and joint HDR programs
HDR Skills Resources
International compliance review
Research Ethics Management System (REMS)
Research Journey Webpage
Research Training Workshops and Events

7.   CONTACT INFORMATION

For queries relating to this document please contact:

Guideline Owner	Dean, Graduate Research
All Enquiries Contact	Manager, Graduate Research Services
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8. **APPROVAL HISTORY**

Guideline approved by:	Dean, Graduate Research
Date guideline first approved:	9 May 2024
Date last modified:	23 February 2026
Revision history:	22 July 2024 The guideline was re-drafted to remove inconsistencies and ambiguity. 23 February 2026 The guideline was updated, with revisions to the Milestone Extension section to ensure alignment with the Admission, Enrolment and Academic Progress Rules.
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HPCM file reference:	