



Transferable Skills Training and Industry Engagement

The ACGR Executive agrees that:

- in order to meet national innovation priorities and the professional development needs of HDR candidates, all higher degrees by research programs should encompass the development of transferable or employability skills
- universities should be held accountable for the delivery of appropriate professional/employability skills development programs for HDR candidates
- individual HE providers are best positioned to assess the transferable/employability skills of their HDR cohorts and best positioned, either individually or in collaboration (e.g. IPrep WA or the ATN eGrad School) to develop provision to meet the needs of their candidates

The ACGR commitment to the development of employability skills during candidate has been made clear in the [ACGR Graduate Research Good Practice Principles](#). Sub principles 3.1-3 address career planning and development, skills training, engagement and participation and the need for systematic review of this provision.

Further, the ACGR Executive contends that the existence across the sector of significant provision of transferable/professional skills training and, at the same time, the lack of confidence of industry end-users in the effectiveness of this training points to the need for a mechanism to audit provision against agreed national standards.

Thus, the ACGR Executive proposes that the ACOLA review might usefully focus on mechanisms to hold HEPs accountable for graduate skills development and evaluation in the same way that they are held accountable for the quality of programs they deliver more generally.

The accountability approach is superior to a more “prescriptive” approach and

- is in line with the TEQSA model which audits HEPs against standards articulated in both the AQF and the HESF.
- accommodates both a national standards approach and individual institutional autonomy in devising programs and provision to ensure standards and learning outcomes are attained
- enables individual training programs to recognise the prior learning of those candidates entering a research degree with years of industry experience behind them and seeking research training to augment their industry skills, and
- supports auditing against standards that are robust, regular and transparent. In the same way that professional and institutional reaccreditation requires demonstration of appropriate processes, quality assurance, accessibility and



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delivery, university HDR program delivery and support mechanisms should be audited to ensure that programs are provided and support available to meet the specific training needs of their candidates.

These national standards should be developed with significant (broadly defined) industry input and address the following issues:

- clear articulation by every university of the (non-research specific) skill sets that each candidate will acquire by the completion of their candidature
- skills programs available to address each of these identified skill sets
- curriculum development (or approval) within each university informed by strong industry engagement
- early assessment of the skill level and development needs of every candidate, followed by the preparation of appropriate learning plans for every student
- programs accessible to all regardless of location and enrolment type
- assessment regimes built into programs (or as hurdle requirements for degree completion) to assure that skills needs identified had been met.

With respect to the operationalization of such an approach, the ACGR Executive proposes two models and a third model which combines the first two:

1. The skill guidelines/principles could be incorporated into the Higher Education Standards Framework and included as part of existing TEQSA institutional review processes.
2. Alternatively a model of collaborative self-regulation could be instituted with Graduate Research Schools (or their equivalent) reviewing each other. ACGR could play a coordinating role in the second option.
3. Given that TEQSA audits may not in all cases have the scope to review to this level of detail in research training programs, the two models are run in tandem.

If the reference to HDR employability skills training in the HESF is restricted to relatively high level statements then ACGR would be pleased to work with industry representatives to develop an Employability Training and Industry Engagement Good Practice Principles statement.

This would augment its current range of Good Practice Principles and be used as a reference point for TEQSA's audit of the HESF. This approach would enable Australian HEPs to cross-reference international best practice through incorporation of principles from a range of international programs and frameworks such as the UK Vitae Researcher Development Framework.



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ACGR members are also cognizant of the call for recognition and promotion of skills training undertaken by candidates and would have no objection to recording on graduates' Australian Higher Education Graduation Statements that particular types of skills training has been undertaken.

Finally additional mechanisms could be put in place to promote to employers the kinds of skills and attributes that Australian trained PhD graduates would bring to their business, e.g. The Queensland Government [*PhD Employment Experience Program*](#)