

Research Training Program Guidelines and how internships affect RTP Scholarships

The Research Training Program (RTP) commenced on 1 January 2017 along with the corresponding *Commonwealth Scholarship Guidelines (Research) 2017* (RTP Guidelines). These Guidelines set out requirements for the administration of RTP Scholarships, including updated advice for the treatment of suspensions and internships. Higher Education Providers (HEPs) can access to these guidelines, frequently asked questions and advice on the RTP website at <https://www.education.gov.au/research-training-program>.

Some universities have raised questions with APR.Intern and the Department of Education regarding the potential impact of internships under the National Research Internships Program (NRIP) on RTP Scholarships. The following information addresses these questions and other issues concerning the interaction of RTP Scholarships and internships.

Options for RTP scholarship students

To facilitate an RTP Scholarship student's participation in an internship, HEPs may consider either:

- suspending a student's RTP Scholarship during the internship (if the HEP does not wish to provide RTP support during the period of the internship and does not wish the internship to impact on a student's RTP duration) *or*
- continuing a student's RTP Scholarship support during the internship (if the HEP is happy for a possible internship top-up benefit to be provided and for the internship to impact on the RTP duration).

RTP leave provisions should not be used to support student internship participation.

RTP Guidelines internship requirements

The only specific provisions relating to internships in the RTP Guidelines is [Section 1.6.45 \(11\)](#) which requires that each HEP publicly set out arrangements for research internships that addresses impacts on RTP stipend rates and duration as part of their RTP Scholarship Policy.

Student eligibility

All RTP Scholarship students, including domestic and international student interns placed through NRIP, must be enrolled (without suspension) in a current higher degree by research (HDR) course in order to receive RTP Scholarship support. More information on eligibility requirements is available in [Section 1.5](#) of the RTP Guidelines.

RTP Scholarship suspensions

The RTP Guidelines defines an [RTP Scholarship suspension](#) as a period of time when the scholarship holder is not receiving RTP Scholarship support. A HEP is therefore able to suspend an RTP Scholarship for a period of time to enable a student to undertake an internship and receive an internship stipend without also receiving RTP support. An RTP Scholarship suspension must be

approved in accordance with a HEP's RTP Scholarship Policy, which may apply additional rules for suspensions beyond those specified in the RTP Guidelines.

[Section 1.6.5](#) of the RTP Guidelines specifies that RTP suspensions do not contribute to the duration of RTP Scholarships. This means an internship undertaken during an RTP suspension would have no impact on a student's total period of RTP support. This differs from previous arrangements in place for Australian Postgraduate Award (APA) scholarships, which required that the duration of an APA be reduced by any periods of study undertaken during a suspension.

These requirements only relate only to the RTP Scholarship suspensions, and not HDR enrolment suspensions, where different arrangements may apply.

Internships undertaken concurrently with RTP Scholarships

In the instance of student receiving both an RTP Scholarship and an internship stipend concurrently, the internship stipend can be paid as a top up as long as this amount does not exceed 75 per cent of the students RTP stipend rate. The 75 per cent threshold is calculated on an annual basis.

For more information is available in to [Section 1.5\(2\)](#) of the RTP Guidelines.

Timing of the internship

There are no specific RTP provisions relating to the timely completion of HDRs. All HDR completions are included in the RTP funding formula regardless of the time taken to complete.

The date that a student is considered to have completed their HDR course and is no longer be enrolled is a decision for each HEP. Options include the date of thesis submission, or the date that a thesis passes examination. If a HEP determines that a student only completes their HDR course at the end of the thesis examination process and remains an enrolled student in the interim period following the initial thesis submission, then the student would be able to undertake an internship after the initial thesis submission date. This could take place with or without RTP scholarship support.

Alternatively, a HEP could establish an additional unit of study to facilitate a student undertaking the internship, with the HDR course only considered to be completed following completion of the additional unit.

Impact on research block grants allocations

The extension of an HDR by up to 4 or 5 months to allow for a student to undertake an internship would only have a marginal impact on a HEP's research block grant allocation. For example, if an internship was undertaken toward the end of a year, then the extension may have the result of deferring the HDR completion to the following calendar year. However, such impacts would expect to be minimal and the HEP would be rewarded with research block grant funding for the HDR completion in the following grant year.

Further Questions

If universities have any further questions, please contact RBGrants@education.gov.au.