



ACGR RESPONSE NATIONAL INDUSTRY PHD DRAFT GUIDELINES

20 July 2022

The Australian Council of Graduate Research (ACGR) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft guidelines for the National Industry PhD.

ACGR was established in 1995 and is Australia's peak body for graduate research education. Our purpose is to promote and support excellence in graduate research education through establishing best practice standards, providing a forum for networking and practice sharing amongst graduate research leaders, influencing the development of graduate research policy and promoting the benefits of graduate research. Every Australian university, and several other higher education providers who are accredited to deliver higher degrees by research, is a member of ACGR and is represented by a senior academic leader, typically Dean or Pro Vice-Chancellor of Graduate Research.

ACGR is appreciative of the opportunity to work with the Department of Education on this and previous government initiatives to support and enhance graduate research training. We note the extensive consultation and transformative work undertaken during the ACOLA Review of Research Training and the subsequent Research Training Implementation Plan which, with Ministerial endorsement, signalled and enabled some critical priorities for graduate research in Australia.

Taking into consideration these priorities, ACGR has consulted with its members regarding the intent and operation of the new Industry PhD and the draft guidelines as presented. We are pleased to provide the following response for consideration by the Department of Education.

General Comments

ACGR commends the work of the Department and the advisory committee in the development of the program, particularly recognising the industry input that has been considered. We appreciate that funding has been earmarked through the research commercialisation action plan to support the program and support the opportunities that it provides for PhD candidates to undertake a research project with a potential industry application, equipping them with the skills and experience to work at the interface of university and industry research sectors.

The ACOLA Review of Research Training clearly stated that "Australia's research training system is an investment designed to deliver new knowledge through the production of Masters and Doctoral theses, and to produce a workforce with the skills required to transform that knowledge into economic and social benefits". The Industry PhD program should be



grounded on this premise and not prioritise development of commercial industry outcomes at the expense of the educative value of the PhD as a vehicle for research training.

With this overarching principle in mind, we make the following additional observations and suggestions to further improve the implementation and operation of the two streams of the Industry PhD Program.

Collaboration Agreements

We note that the service provider is to responsible for facilitating participating university-industry partner collaborative agreements and would like confirmation that this includes the development and promotion of a series of standard agreements which will help set and meet appropriate expectations for all parties.

These agreements should cover the ownership and management of relevant Intellectual Property, industry confidentiality requirements and arrangements for examination and publication of the thesis and also recognise the university's responsibility to use government funding to generate publicly accessible research outcomes.

Number of funded positions available

ACGR members are keen to understand the extent of the funding and the number and timing of funded places that will be available in each year of the program. This is key information to help universities determine if and how they will apply for places in the program.

Engagement by Industry Researchers

Several universities have questioned whether the \$40,000 p.a. subsidy to the partner will be sufficient to backfill the employee who is undertaking the Industry Researcher PhD. It should be made clear that industry professionals undertaking a full time PhD in the Industry Researcher stream must have at least .8 EFT to work on their research project.

Embedded Training Program

While the concept of providing training to equip candidates to create impact and engage with end users is a good goal, this area needs further work. Specifically the following details are important in determining the feasibility and viability of the proposed training component of the program:

- funding source for the development of content for the training program.
- mechanism for ensuring that this program does not duplicate training provided by universities.



- a way to develop content which is relevant to all disciplines and candidates from all backgrounds.
- means of delivering the program and ensuring that the 12-week commitment does not impede the candidates' progress in their research project, particularly given any coursework required by the enrolling university.

Role of the University and the Service Provider

The allocation of projects in this program should not include a determination by the service provider whether the proposal aligns with the university's research interests and capability (7.1.3). Universities should make this determination prior to submitting the EOI. It's not the service provider's place or area of expertise to decide this.

We are similarly concerned about the statement in Attachment A 9.6 that the Service Provider will monitor PhD progress through annual reports. Academic progress is the responsibility of the enrolling university.

List of all Roles and Responsibilities

Further work is required to clarify the roles and responsibilities detailed in Attachment A. For example, 5.6 states that the industry must provide "appropriate facilities and infrastructure" but this is not in the list of responsibilities in the Attachment A (9.7).

The guidelines also make no reference at all to the requirement of industry partners, contained in the infographics, that their employees in the Industry Researcher PhD must retain their "full salary benefits" throughout their PhD. This information really should be made explicit in the Guidelines.

Leave Provisions

The draft clauses around leave conditions are problematic. Where the university's leave provisions exceed the minimum requirements of the RTP, it is crucial that there is a provision which states that the university's policy prevails.

Clause 5.4 needs revision. The candidates will be able to access leave entitlements available to them as candidates as well as entitlements they have as a staff member. We suggest re-writing this clause to allow Industry Researcher PhD Candidates to access leave for their PhD in accordance with their entitlements at their enrolling university. The candidature and employment need to be treated differently.



Termination and changes to arrangements

The conditions for termination in cases where the partner organisation ceases its business operation are unfair to the candidate and to the university (8.2 and 8.3). Once awarded, the scholarship should only be terminated if the candidate no longer meets eligibility, withdraws or discontinues, aligning with the RTP guidelines. The scheme requires a university supervisor with the appropriate expertise. The university supervisors should be able to see the project through, albeit with some modifications, in the case of an Industry Partner closing.

Similarly changes in arrangements would be necessary if the industry professional terminates their association with the industry partner midway through their candidature.

Reporting Requirements

Acknowledging the importance of program monitoring and quality assurance, early advice is required about the reporting requirements for participating universities. We recommend that any data collection to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of this program should be aligned with data that is already collected and reported to the Department of Education. Any new data collection or evaluation metrics will need to be scoped for inclusion into regular business processes and subsequent system changes determined, funded and implemented.

For further information please contact

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