

HDR Admissions: Making good decisions

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Quality in HDR Admissions

Who are we trying to attract/recruit and why?

- Meeting Regulatory & Quality frameworks
- Meeting strategic goals for the Institution (e.g. HDR growth)
- Safeguarding the University's reputation
- Respecting Supervisors & Applicants
- Avoiding unsuccessful or troublesome candidatures that will require ongoing interventions
- Linking with scholarship applications
- Delivering for industry partnerships

Qualities of ideal candidates

What are we looking for?

Preparedness for research through:

- Academic credentials – disciplinary content and achievement levels
- Personal attributes – curiosity, passion, independence/autonomy, critical thinking, diligence
- Relevant professional experience
- Research outputs
- The UKCGE have completed a body of work on [competency-based admissions](#) (Julie Sheldon and colleagues, February 2024)

And more? Simpatico with the supervision team

How the process works

- Typically online
- Expressions of interest / Multi-staged admissions processes
- A range of documentation is required (and from different parties)
- Time-pressured (to a lesser or greater extent)
- Involves various stakeholders – Grad School, Faculty, International admissions, education agents
- Applicants, Supervisors and Administrators may have different levels of visibility over the workflow
- Who does the final approval lie with? (e.g., Grad School, Faculty)

Key components in HDR admissions

A holistic assessment of someone's readiness to succeed in a HDR program

- Applicant background (CV, transcripts, publication track record, professional experience)
- English competency testing (e.g. IELTS)
- Project proposal (scope, feasibility)
- Supervision team (expertise match, pastoral care) and 'receiving environment'
- Resource considerations (equipment, partnerships, funding)
- Regulatory Checking (Genuine Students; Sanctions, Critical Technologies)
- Interview and/or referee reports

Quality Frameworks

ACGR Good Practice Principles and Framework (Selection and Admission)

- Transparent, documented processes
- Clear description of criteria
- Consistent application of policy

'The Golden Trifecta': applicant, project and team

"Admission of candidates occurs only where there is an appropriate fit between the applicant, research environment, available resources and supervision capacity."

TEQSA – HESF Requirements

Higher Education Standards Framework, Domain 4:

HDR candidates are admitted only where:

- *training can be provided in a supervisory and study environment of research activity or other creative endeavour, inquiry and scholarship, and the supervision and resources required for their project are available*

And there are continuing supervision arrangements:

- *a principal supervisor who holds a doctoral degree, or has equivalent research experience, and who is active in research and publishing in, or otherwise making original contributions to, a relevant field or discipline*
- *at least one associate supervisor with relevant research expertise, and*
- *the principal supervisor is on staff, has a relevant adjunct appointment, or is otherwise formally contracted and accountable to the provider.*

Other Regulatory Frameworks

- **ESOS Standards** – minimum for face-to-face contact hours and ability to monitor attendance (=on campus or online supervision?)
- **Defence Export Controls** (regulating the export of military and dual-use goods and technology) – self assessment tool
- **Foreign Interference Guidelines** – due diligence & risk management
- **Critical Technologies in the National Interest** (Ministerial approval)
- **Commonwealth Scholarships Guidelines (Research) 2017** if admitting for a RTP scholarship – Hons 1 Equivalent required
- **Institutional policies** including conflict of interest, workloads etc

Academic Admissions criteria

- Course Rules /Admissions Policy for rigor of each criterion (e.g. Hons1 only?)
- Cases for equivalency
 - Course equivalency (AEI-NOOSR/NARIC/other)
 - Professional equivalency (what kind of employment is research-related?)
 - Research skill equivalency (e.g. the challenge of co-authored publications)
 - How are vocational training certificates positioned?
- Plus English criteria

Case Study 1

Selecting a candidate

- Referral from a collaborator
- Claims of strong academic credentials – but no transcript
- Unproven English
- Apparently enrolled elsewhere
- Seeking admission ahead of scholarship application deadline

Discussion points

- What the key risks in making a hasty decision here?
- What steps would you take to assure yourself of the quality of this applicant?
- How will you manage the expectations of the supervisor – and what advice might you give them about selecting HDR candidates in the future?

Case Study 2

Non-traditional applicants

- B Sc graduate – no honours
 - RA in a medical research institute
 - Two coauthored papers
 - MRI is a strategic partner
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- Seeking H1 equivalence for admission & scholarship

Discussion points

- What are the key obstacles to a) approving admission; b) offering a scholarship?
- How does your institution deal with non-standard applicants of this kind?
- What further information might you seek from the team to reassure you about the applicant's research skills?
- How might you navigate the University's rules and policies and placate your head of school?
- Is another pathway possible?

Problematic Admissions

Risks

- Time wasters (supervisor-shoppers; re-applicants & multi-applicants)
- Ghost writers, plagiarisers and AI-abusers
- Fraudulent documents or lies of omission

Red flags

- Requests for rapid assessment/offer (e.g. industry partner waiting)
- Mismatches between quality of writing (emails vs application); or between CV and Supervisor Appraisal
- Candidate is already enrolled in something else, or with someone else
- Supervisors taking on projects outside of their field (or nominating colleagues unawares)
- Requests to waive entry criteria (including English)

Approval authorities (...if you said yes, it becomes your responsibility...!)

Appeals

Q&A

Promoting equity and access in HDR

Taking pride in who you accept, as much as who you reject

How much is your responsibility, versus the responsibility of the supervisory team?

How many of the 'desirable criteria' can actually be evaluated on the basis of a written application?

And finally:

Does quality in admissions = quality in completions?