ACGR Good Practice Guidelines for

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Education

November, 2025

ACGR
AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF GRADUATE RESEARCH

Background

- In April 2025, ACGR agreed to update its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Education guidelines

  - Established a working group

  - Discussed how to update the guidelines

  - Worked from the existing guidelines to update, add and remove statements, where necessary.

Working Group

- *Professor Sadie Heckenberg (Co-Chair) – President, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium (NATSIHEC)*

- *Professor Louise Sharpe (Co-Chair) – President, ACGR*

- *Professor Kathryn Gilbey – Executive Dean of Higher Education and Research, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education*

- *Professor Peter Anderson – Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous, University of New England*

- *Professor Jane Maree Maher, Deputy Dean of Graduate Studies, Monash University*

- *Professor Carolin Plewa, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Researcher Education and Development), The University of Adelaide*

- *Professor Samantha Bennett, Associate Dean Higher Education, Australian National University*

Plan

- Invite Sadie to give a brief overview

- Present the content of the new guidelines

- Panel conversation with the working group

- Invite Peter Anderson to close with his hopes about how the guidelines might influence the sector.

Existing RDFs pointed to various influences

Including:

- VITAE

- The Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research

- AQF and NZQF learning outcomes

- Public policy re. industry readiness

- Some universities positioned HDRs as part of whole researcher development lifecycle, while others had separate RDFs for HDRs.

Using the guidelines

These guidelines have been collaboratively developed by the Australian Council of Graduate Research (ACGR) with appreciated support and advice from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium (NATSIHEC). The Guidelines provide credible, constructive and practical advice for candidates, supervisors, universities and other stakeholders. They should be read alongside the *Australian Graduate Research Good Practice Principles* which articulate a set of standards considered to be essential for the delivery of graduate research programs and are part of a suite of Good Practice Guidelines that are designed to support institutions as they develop their strategies and processes in particular important areas of operation. They should also be read alongside the AITSIS Guidelines (https://aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-10/aiatsis-code-ethics.pdf).

Prioritising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research education

1. Universities should recognise Indigenous knowledge systems, epistemologies, methods of documentation, and accountability structures for research and broaden their HDR protocols, such as thesis format, to support such research.

2. Ensure that the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduate research is recognised across all levels of university governance and is supported by an explicit policy framework.

3. Establish ambitious but realistic targets for recruitment, retention, support and graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander HDR candidates and report on these as part of an adaptive management cycle.

4. Recognise that indigenous HDR candidates can have distinctive pathways and skills sets that should be considered when assessing applications for admission to HDR programs.

5. Recognise and celebrate the achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander HDR candidates at an institutional level.

Support Increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander candidates and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research.

6. Universities should ensure all levels of study and administration engage effectively with Indigenous alumni, academics, university Indigenous centres, institutions and community groups, ensuring pathways to develop a recruitment strategy whereby research degrees are visible, resourced and welcoming.

7. Establish pathways and support the transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to increase participation in HDR programs.

8. Conduct outreach programs to demonstrate the value of HDR education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and the value of this research for their communities.

9. Develop culturally appropriate pathways to HDR admission that recognise prior learning, professional experience and community engagement.

10. Establish stipend scholarships that meet the unique cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander HDR candidates.

11. Universities may provide opportunities to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander HDR candidates to provide appropriately renumerated high-value services to their schools and faculties.

12. Provide flexible entry pathways that include bridging programs and recognize professional practice during the selection process.

Maximising supervision capabilities

13. Equip supervisors with necessary training to support Indigenous research methodologies in the supervision of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander HDR candidates.

14. Equip supervisors with necessary training to provide ethical guidance to non-Indigenous HDR candidates undertaking Indigenous-related research.

15. Where possible and where there is capacity include an appropriately qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supervisor on supervisory panel and using appropriately qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander examiners wherever appropriate.

16. Improve peer networks for all supervisors to share learnings and approaches.

17. All Supervisors demonstrate respect for Indigenous knowledges and epistemologies.

Recommending, supporting and promoting culturally-competent engagement and opportunities

18. Provide welcoming, supportive and culturally safe environments.

19. Develop initiatives that encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander HDR candidates' families and communities to support them.

20. Establish support networks of senior Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics within and across institutions.

21. Encourage connections to community mentors, Elders and/or expert cultural knowledge holders.

22. Provide cohort support at the level of institutions and institutional groupings and encourage candidates to join national and international peer networks.

23. Provide mentoring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander candidates who seek this within their candidature.

24. Develop a dedicated website or other online resources that facilitate peer networking and inform candidates of the support available both within the university and through national programs such as the National Indigenous Research and Knowledge Network and the Indigenous Studies Research Network (link).

25. Support Universities to provide culturally safe and appropriate training for supervisors and HDR leaders who support Indigenous researchers.

26. Invest adequately in research capacity building programs that support successful progression and completion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander HDR candidates.

Promoting unique Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives

27. Include workshops on Indigenous knowledges and intellectual property as part of the academic professional development of all HDR candidates and supervisors.

28. Include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and global First Nations scholarship in relevant coursework subjects.

29. Recognise, support and promote supervisors' awareness of relevant national research ethics guidelines, such as the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

Questions? Comments?