ACGR Researcher Development Framework

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF GRADUATE RESEARCH

Background

- In April 2025, ACGR agreed to develop a researcher development framework (RDF) for the Australasian context
  - Useful to communicate to key stakeholders the value of the PhD and HDR
  - Helpful for institutions to guide their researcher development programs
  - Important to advocate within our institutions for resources to support HDR training

Background

One of the primary benefits of a sector-level framework is its power to advocate for the value of PhD students and research education at the highest levels, including government and industry. By standardizing key competencies and highlighting the strategic importance of research training, the framework elevates the profile of PhD studies, positioning research education as a vital driver of national growth and competitiveness.

Furthermore, a sector-level approach facilitates stronger collaborations between academia, government, and industry by creating shared understandings and expectations around research skills and outcomes. This alignment helps demonstrate the tangible contributions of research students to innovation, policy development, and industry advancement, thereby encouraging increased investment and support.

The RDF landscape

- As of April 2025, 22 ANZ universities had an articulated RDF (28 had not)
  - 6 were modeled on or directly linked to VITAE
  - 11 linked to a general professional development program
  - 5 linked to a specialist researcher development unit
  - Additionally, 7 universities offered specialist researcher development programs but without a public-facing RDF

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.

Existing RDFs varied in tone:

- Checklists with brief descriptions of core skills
- List of attributes and competencies with lengthier descriptions
- Some articulated competencies specific to the institution
- Some were blueprints for the researcher development program
- Overall, the audience of the RDF was not clear: HDR researchers, institutions, supervisors.

ACGR working group objectives:

- Establish principles for how an overarching RDF should operate
- Identify any regulatory frameworks (e.g. the Code) that intersect
- Map existing RDFs, identifying areas of overlap and divergence between them
- Determine an overarching ACGR RDF based on the above

ACGR working group composition

The working group drew together 18 diverse contributors:

- From Australia and New Zealand
- Metro and regional universities, small scale through to large Go8
- A balance of professional and academic staff
- Researcher developers, learning designers, deans, directors and PVCs of graduate research

RDF design principles

That the ACGR RDF should be:

Culturally appropriate

Holistic

Able to be tailored to institutional needs

Inclusive and accessible

Flexible

Guide for practice

Embedded

RDF Statement of purpose

The ACGR Researcher Development Framework (RDF) enables excellence in higher degree research education. It promotes innovative, inclusive, culturally appropriate, research-informed and well rounded opportunities for the personalised development of higher degree research candidates.

The ACGR RDF aims to facilitate the development of professional researchers, equipping HDR candidates with transferrable and professional skills to prepare them for career transitions and/or to contribute to their communities. It assists supervisors to help their candidates navigate the training opportunities available. It also enables stakeholders in universities to align offerings and priorities to support HDR candidates.

Overarching regulatory ecosystem

- HESF (especially 4.2)
- AQF
- NZQF
- Code (especially re. supervision)
- ACGR Good Practice Guides

Creating the RDF

- Sample of 10 well-articulated institutional frameworks, including VITAE
- All competencies or skills were added to a master spreadsheet
- Similar items identified and consolidated
- Outliers were reviewed for relevance
- Refinement of ACGR RDF inclusions through consensus discussion over 6 meetings
- Submitted to ACGR Executive for review and development of visual and conceptual design

Ethical practice and inclusivity

- Practice is ethical, responsible and conducted with integrity
- Respect for discipline diversity and plurality of research approaches
- Inclusive practice that embraces diversity of researcher experience
- Respectful and appropriate engagement with Indigenous/First Nations peoples and knowledges
- A Global outlook that embraces cultural difference, viewpoint diversity, and sustainability
- Practice that ensures the safety and wellbeing of self, others, animals, and environments, reflected through good governance and data management

Innovation and Intellectual rigour

- Highly developed critical, reflexive and creative thinking that produces good academic judgement
- Development of disciplinary expertise and specialist knowledge
- Development of research design capabilities, relevant to discipline
- Ability to identify, analyse and synthesise extant knowledge for the purposes of argument, question or concept development
- Creation of new knowledge through the collection and analysis of complex information
- Command of sophisticated digital environments and tools
- Production of scholarly works that convey new knowledge

Collaboration and communication

- Communication of research outcomes and knowledge transfer across diverse modalities, audiences and contexts
- Effective project planning, management, oversight and data management
- Ability to navigate and balance complex institutional, disciplinary, regulatory, and collaborative expectations

Impactful engagement beyond academia

- Impact and engagement objectives embedded in research design
- Cultivation of a professional identity grounded in research reputation
- Formation of effective working relationships with community, industry and/or university partners in [or end users of] research

Personal resilience and leadership

- Critical reflection on practice to develop professional self and exercise accountability
- Ability to build strategic relationships to access innovative information, ideas and opportunities
- Ability to remain composed and solution-focused in the managing professional challenges
- Ability to prioritise personal wellbeing, when necessary, and to encourage others to do the same.

RDF Working Group Acknowledgement

- **Associate Professor Dan Bendrups, PVC Graduate and Global Research, La Trobe University (Working Group Lead)**
- Louise Sharpe, PVC Researcher Training, USyd
- Emma Nicholson, Dean School of Graduate Research, University of Waikato Rosie Nash, HDR Coordinator, UTAS
- Dani Milos, HDR Coordinator, Flinders
- Danielle Faccer, Senior Manager Researcher Development, UniSC
- Tracy Riley, Dean Postgraduate Research, Massey University Sarah Collins, Deputy Dean Graduate Research School, UWA
- Jeanette Fyffe, PVC Researcher Development, Deakin
- Wendy Wright, Dean Graduate Research, Federation
- Rachel Spronken-Smith, Deputy Dean Graduate Research School,Otago
- Andrew Dunstan, Program Manager Researcher Development, UniMelb
- Katy Dolman, Manager Researcher Education and Development, University of Adelaide
- A/Prof John Rees, Director Research Development and Training, UTS
- Dr Heidi Collins, Doctoral Experience Manager, University of Auckland
- Katarina Prince, Director, Research Training Services, RMIT
- Professor Jane Stadler, Dean of Graduate Research, UNE
- Dr Jo Edmonston, Graduate Education Officer, UWA

Questions? Comments?

Industry Internship Survey Results

- Surveyed 52 institutions in Australia and New Zealand
- 100% response rate (not all questions)
- On average, across Australian Unis 42 internships/yr
- Approx 25/43 (58%) internships were DESE-eligible
- Of those who responded (n = 18), approx. 215 students annually who were “meaningfully engaged with industry”

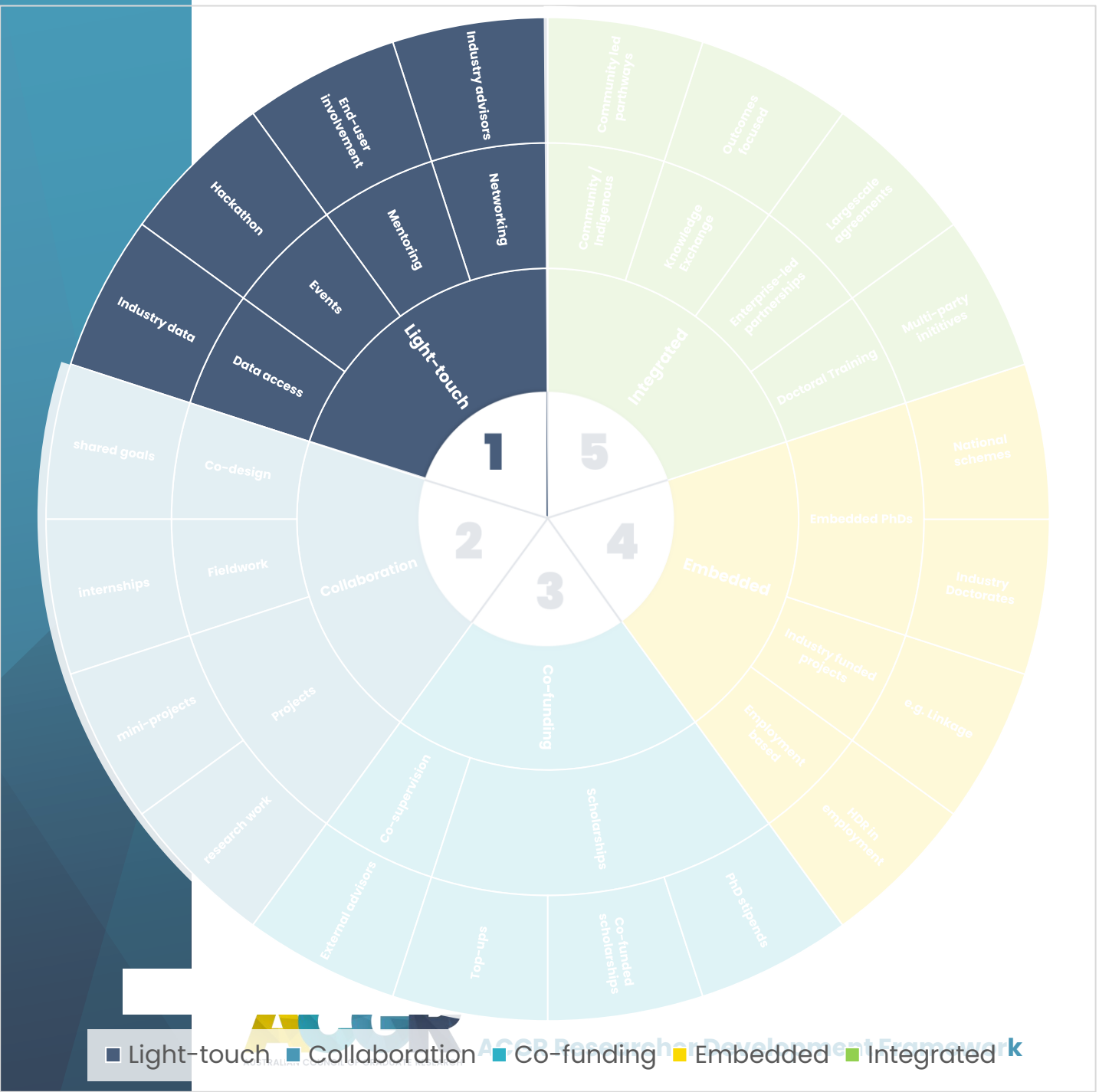
Sources of Industry Internships

Source	Percentage of Institutions (n = 36)
Industry partner/supervisor	84%
Student-initiated	75%
National Provider (e.g. APR Intern)	72%

- 87% of institutions did not have an automatic extension associated with internship
- The majority of full-time internships were funded by the industry partner
- The majority of part-time internships were funded by the University

Levels of Industry Engagement in HDR Programs

Thematic analysis of 35 detailed written responses about the types of industry engagement within institutions



Levels of Industry Engagement

Level 1: Focus on exposure and networking, with minimal structural commitments.

Deep, strategic, and systemic engagement with industry, producing enduring collaborations.

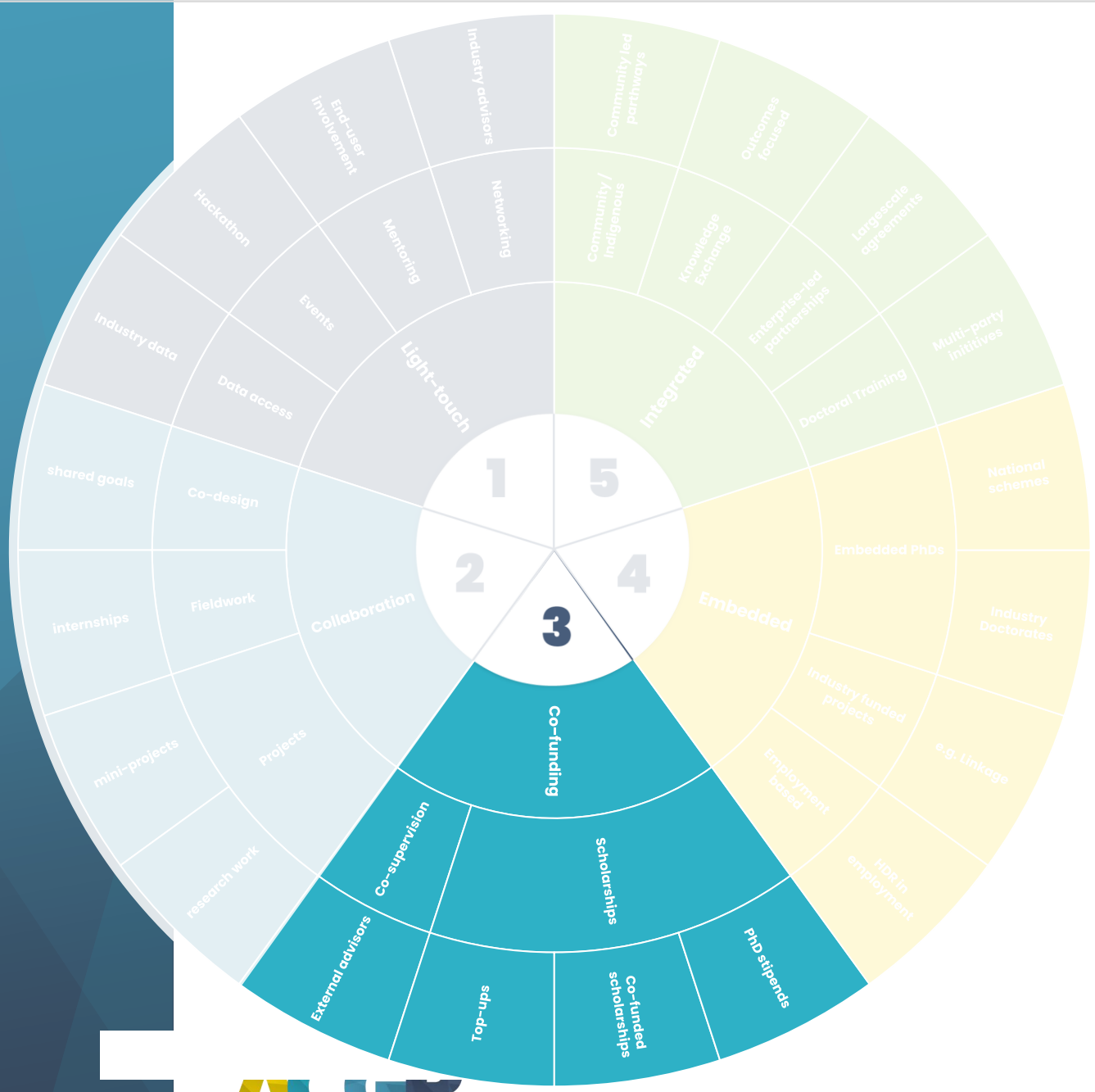
- **Networking & mentoring**
  - Industry mentors or advisors.
  - End-users on supervisory panels (without major project role).
- **Events & programs**
  - Hackathons, workshops, networking sessions run by Enterprise/Industry Engagement teams.
- **Data access & resources**
  - Use of industry data, equipment, or field sites.

Levels of Industry Engagement

Level 2: Collaborative/Applied Research

Candidates gain applied research experience but remain primarily university-based.

- **Co-designed research projects**
  - Research questions developed jointly with industry.
  - Shared impact goals built into project design.
- **Collaborative research grants/projects**
  - HDR candidates contributing to larger projects with industry partners, including industry internships.
  - Research assistant (RA) roles on industry-linked projects.
- **Applied fieldwork**
  - Data collection in workplaces, clinical placements, or field sites (NGOs, agri-business, health providers).

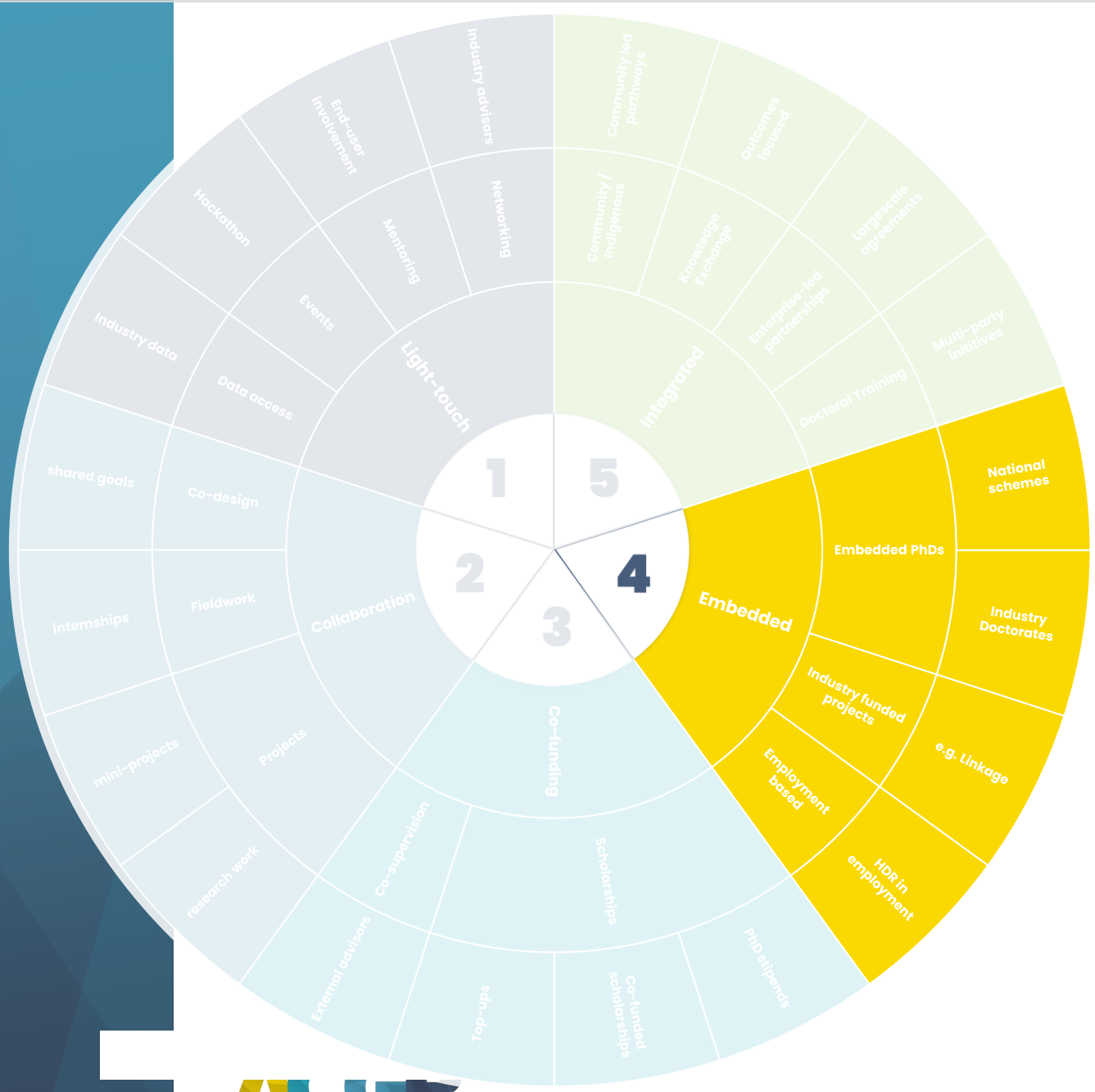


Levels of Industry Engagement

Level 3: Shared Supervision & Co-Funding

Formalised partnerships in HDR governance and funding.

- **Co-supervision with industry**
  - External industry supervisors formally included in projects.
  - Training provided by both academic and industry partners.
- **Industry-linked scholarships**
  - Top-up scholarships funded by industry.
  - Doctoral Partnership Scholarships (co-funded stipends).
  - External study awards tied to industry partners.

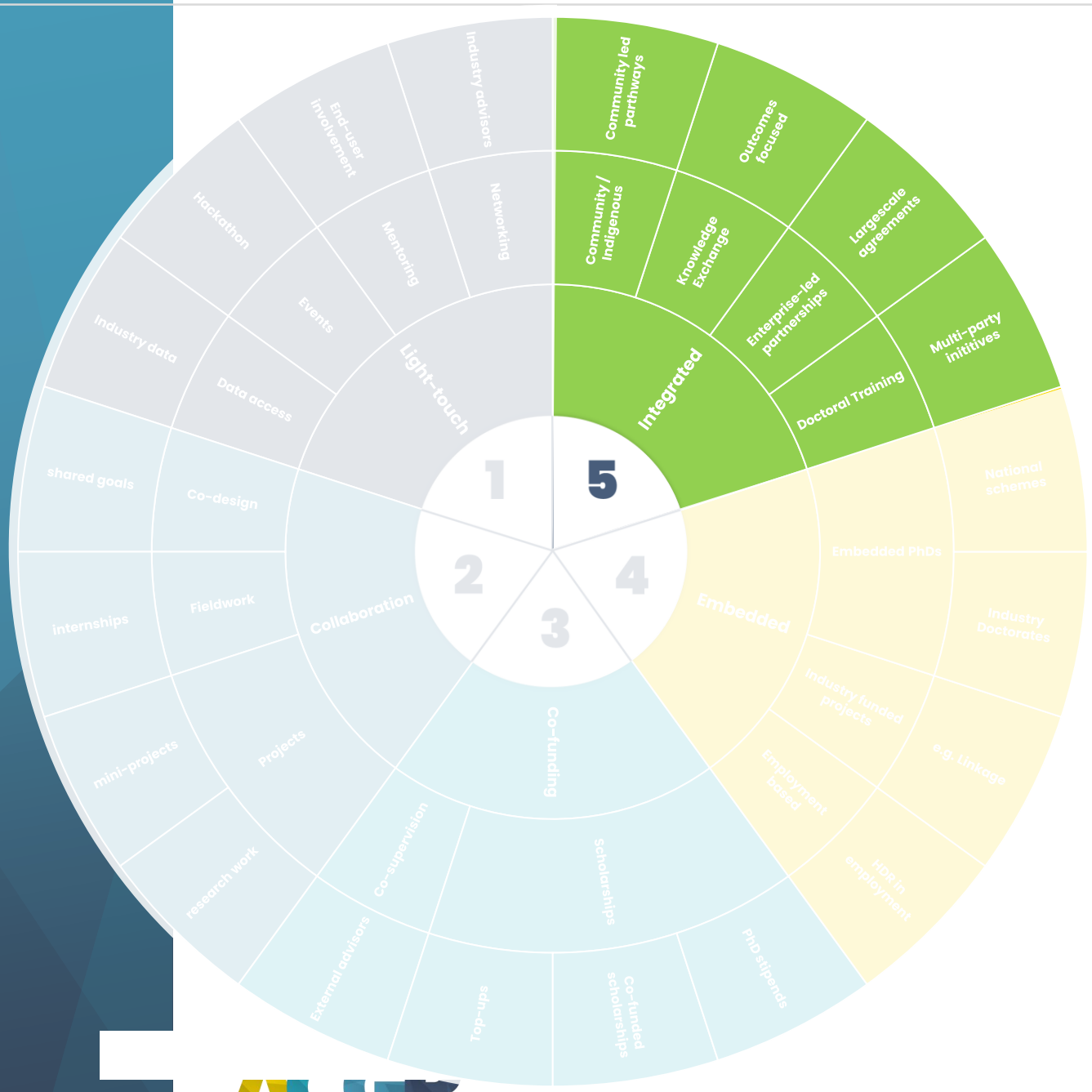


Levels of Industry Engagement

Level 4: Embedded/ Employment-Linked Research

Candidates are directly positioned within industry contexts.

- **Embedded PhDs / Industry doctorates**
  - Projects physically based in industry partner organisations.
  - Structured national schemes (e.g., ARC, CSIRO, NIPHD).
- **Employment-based research**
  - Candidates already working in industry or clinical settings aligning HDR studies with their professional role.
  - Part-time candidature alongside ongoing employment.
- **Industry-funded projects**
  - Entire project funded by an industry partner, often long-term or strategic partnerships.



Levels of Industry Engagement

Level 5: Integrated Impact & Partnership Models

Deep, strategic, and systemic engagement with industry, producing enduring collaborations.

- **Doctoral Training Centres / Centres of Excellence**
  - Multi-party initiatives with sustained industry involvement.
- **Enterprise-led partnerships**
  - Large-scale agreements with industry embedding HDR candidates over multiple years.
- **Knowledge exchange and translation**
  - Strong focus on delivering outcomes: research translation in workplace, cultural services, contract research, and policy impact.
- **Community/Indigenous knowledge integration**
  - Engagement extending beyond “industry” into community-led research impact pathways.

Levels of Industry Engagement

Next Steps

- A high level summary to the Strategic Examination of Research and Development (SERD)
- Had preliminary discussions with Universities Australia re: joint report
- Finalise a report based on the data to ACGR executive for comment/approval
- Work with UA towards a position paper

Questions? Comments?