

ACGR Good Practice Guidelines for

Inclusive Supervision of Neurodivergent HDR Candidates

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About these guidelines

Neurodivergent students are an important part of the research community, bringing diverse perspectives and creative and critical insights that enrich scholarship and innovation.

However, systemic barriers – such as inflexible institutional structures, limited recognition of diverse working styles, and a lack of tailored supports – can create additional challenges for their success. Supervisors are well positioned to help mitigate some of these barriers, yet there is little practical guidance available on how best to do so.

Supporting more neurodivergent Higher Degree Research (HDR) students to thrive not only ensures equity and inclusion, but also strengthens the research sector by broadening the range of ideas, methodologies, and solutions generated.

Using these guidelines

The ACGR Good Practice Guidelines for Inclusive Supervision of Neurodivergent HDR Candidates have been developed to positively support the supervision of neurodivergent research candidates. They draw on findings from a recent systematic review of the literature on neurodivergent students in research degrees,¹ as well as broad consultation with HDR supervisors and neurodivergent HDR candidates. Together, these Guidelines provide both an evidence-informed and student-informed foundation for the recommendations that follow.

This document is part of a suite of ACGR [Good Practice Guidelines](#), which are designed to support institutions as they develop their strategies and practices around graduate research. These Guidelines support the [Australian Graduate Research Good Practice Principles](#)—a set of standards deemed essential to the delivery of graduate research programs.

¹ Tan, D., Edwards, C., Mewburn, I., Simpson, K., Webster, A., & Brownlow, C. (2025). Understanding the experiences of neurodivergent research students: A mixed methods systematic review. *Studies in Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2025.2573209>

Recommendations

ACGR makes the following recommendations to universities:

Area 1: Foster a neuroaffirming culture

Creating an academic culture that actively values neurodiversity helps dismantle systemic barriers and ensures that neurodivergent HDR candidates can thrive as researchers.

1. Ensure senior academics and university leaders promote a discourse of safety that challenges assumptions of ableism and normativity.
2. Actively challenge narrow conceptions of academic excellence and success by highlighting diverse researcher profiles, strengths-based narratives, and multiple pathways to contribution.
3. Encourage academic cultures that value depth, reflection, and non-linear progress alongside more traditional performance indicators.
4. Facilitate a culture that is responsive to disclosure of diagnosis by proactively ensuring safety for everyone.

Area 2: Create accessible systems

Many neurodivergent HDR candidates face barriers from inaccessible university systems that can be difficult to navigate. These systems include enrolment, confirmation of candidature, annual reviews, and thesis submission.

5. Develop systems that follow best principles of universal design to facilitate positive use by all institution members, including neurodivergent HDR candidates.
6. Work with student support and admissions teams to ensure that guidance on HDR enrolment and progression processes is accessible, step-by-step, and offered in multiple formats, recognising that administrative complexity can be a significant barrier.
7. Provide training for professional members of staff who support neurodivergent HDR candidates.
8. Ensure assessment processes – such as submission of the thesis and oral examinations – are inclusive by offering structured expectations and, where appropriate, alternative or supplementary modes of demonstrating learning outcomes.
9. Ensure policies, procedures, and systems are clear, written in accessible formats, regularly reviewed, and are straightforward to navigate.
10. Ensure clear and equitable implementation of policies and procedures.

Area 3: Provide accommodations and supports for academic progress and wellbeing

University student support areas can sometimes be more effective for undergraduate students compared with HDR candidates. Support needs to be provided for both academic progression and individual wellbeing of HDR candidates.

11. Provide appropriate and where required personalised support for neurodivergent candidates, particularly if existing resources are insufficient to meet their needs.
12. Accommodations for neurodivergent candidates should be built into progression milestones to recognise that progress may not be linear.
13. Provision of equitable access to supports for HDR candidates for both academic development and fostering positive individual wellbeing.
14. Recognise that a full-time completion plan may not be suitable for neurodivergent HDR candidates and provide more opportunities for flexible study pathways.

Area 4: Provide conducive work environments

The physical and organisational environments in which HDR candidates work have a significant impact on wellbeing and productivity. For neurodivergent HDR candidates, sensory accessibility, flexibility, and autonomy in choosing how and where they work are crucial to enabling focus, reducing stress, and supporting sustained engagement in research.

15. Facilitate access to study and research spaces that consider sensory accessibility, offering alternatives to open-plan or hot-desking environments such as quiet areas and private workspaces.
16. Encourage flexible participation in research and training activities, including support for remote work, asynchronous communication, and alternative presentation formats.

Area 5: Enhance supervision capabilities

Supervisors play a pivotal role in shaping HDR experiences, and their ability to create inclusive, flexible, and supportive relationships is critical to the success of neurodivergent candidates. Building these capabilities requires training, reflection, and ongoing professional development that values diversity as strength rather than a deficit.

17. Ensure that supervisors have appropriate skills and ongoing development to support all supervisors in neuroinclusive supervision that recognise both candidate strengths and potential challenges.
18. Ensure supervisors are aware of HDR specific – and crucially, neurodivergent specific – supports and accommodations available within the university.
19. Engage with co-produced training programs where lived experience informs practice alongside institutional requirements.
20. Support supervisors to navigate power dynamics around disclosure by encouraging open, non-assumptive conversations without requiring candidates to disclose a diagnosis or label. Training should emphasise that effective supervision does not depend on disclosure.
21. Embed neuroinclusive supervision as part of core, ongoing professional development for all supervisors, rather than treating it as optional or specialist.
22. Encourage supervisors to provide feedback that is timely, clear, and accessible – for example, using specific language, written summaries, and opportunities for clarification – to support learning and reduce anxiety.
23. Promote supervisory approaches that balance academic challenge with psychological safety, affirming candidates' potential while acknowledging their challenges. Practices should develop and preserve autonomy and self-efficacy, such as offering scaffolded opportunities and respecting different paces of progress.

Area 6: Minimise 'hidden curriculum'

The *hidden curriculum* refers to the unspoken norms, values, and expectations that shape research training and education that are usually socially mediated information rarely made explicit. For neurodivergent HDR candidates – who may have limited access to informal academic networks – this can create systemic barriers to success.

24. Ensure that candidate expectations are clearly documented, including responsibilities of HDR candidates and supervisors.
25. Provide all HDR candidates with practical guidance on academic norms, expectations, and professional conduct, including examples of common practice in research and supervision.
26. Ensure expectations of candidates are clearly articulated and supported through mentoring programs, where appropriate, to allow candidates to navigate university systems without assumptions of implicit knowledge.