HDR Admissions: Getting it 'right'

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Quality in HDR Admissions

Quality admissions = quality completions (or does it?)

Who are we trying to 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 on industry partnerships

Qualities of ideal HDR candidates

What does an ideal candidate look like to you?

Preparedness for research through:

- Academic credentials – disciplinary content and achievement levels
- Personal attributes – curiosity, passion, autonomy, critical thinking, diligence
- Relevant professional experience
- Track record of research outputs
- The UKCGE have completed a body of work on competency-based admissions (Julie Sheldon and colleagues, February 2024)
- Simpatico with the supervision team
- Free from conflict/bias
- A personal context suited to HDR study

Being 'eligible' versus being 'ready'

How the process works

- Typically online and in written format (AI alert!)
- Expressions of interest or 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
- Final approvals authority (e.g., Grad School, Faculty)

Key elements in HDR admissions

- 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, Export Controls)
- Interview and/or referee reports and possibly online profiling

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': a great 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)
- **Higher Education Support (Commonwealth Scholarships) Guidelines 2025** (RTP scholarship = Hons 1 Equivalent required)
- **Institutional policies** including conflict of interest, workloads and use of GenAI in academic submissions

Academic Admissions criteria

- Course Rules or Admissions Policy relevant to course level
- Cases for equivalency
  - Course equivalency (AEI-NOOSR/NARIC/other)
  - Professional equivalency (what kind of employment is research-related?)
  - Research skill equivalency (e.g. how to deal with co-authored publications)
  - How are vocational training certificates positioned?
- English Language Competency (IETLS/PTE/TOEFL/other)

Putting it into practice – case studies

In your workgroups, discuss:

- Case Study 6 (page 8)
- Case Study 7 (page 9)

10 minutes per case study

Please nominate a spokesperson

Case Study 6 (page 8)
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

Review 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 7 (page 9)
Non-standard applicants

- B Sc graduate – no honours
- RA in a medical research institute
- Two coauthored papers
- MRI is a strategic partner

- Seeking H1 equivalence for admission & scholarship

Review points

- What were they 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?

Some Risks and Red Flags

- Time wasters (supervisor-shoppers; re-applicants & multi-applicants)
- Ghost writers, plagiarisers and AI-abusers
- Fraudulent documents or lies of omission
- Mismatches between quality of writing (emails vs application); or between CV and Supervisor Appraisal
- Requests for rapid assessment/offer (e.g. industry partner waiting)
- Candidate is already enrolled in something else, or with someone else
- Supervisors taking on projects outside of their field (or nominating their colleagues unawares)
- Requests to waive entry criteria (including English)

Practice Sharing

Please share one strategy used by your institution that helps to get the best outcomes from HDR admissions

Add a short note into the chat line following your discussion

Q&A

What would make the HDR admissions process easier (and how can ACGR help?)