ENHANCING THE EXPERIENCE & OUTCOMES OF INTERNATIONAL HDR CANDIDATES

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Australian universities host more than 20,000 international higher degree research (HDR) candidates, which constitute around 32 percent of the total HDR cohort\(^1\). This presents both a potential for transnational research development and a challenge for the supervision of international HDR candidates.

Both the HDR cohort and supervisory teams have become increasingly diverse and intercultural. This cultural diversity requires new ways of thinking about, and supporting HDR research training in universities. International HDR candidates can make significant contributions to the development of cultural awareness, transnational networks and importantly, to the enrichment and advancement of research in their host universities. However, this potential often remains under-recognised, and both international candidates and supervisors continue to report challenges in successfully negotiating intercultural supervisory relationships and maximising the potential benefits of intercultural supervision.

Research training managers play a crucial role in ensuring the success of all HDRs, including those from other countries. A strategic whole of institution approach is required to build a community of scholars that welcomes the intellectual, cultural and social contributions of all HDRs. Such an approach should encompass all areas of institutional expertise, including the research training office, faculty and school leadership and management, supervisors, language and learning advisers, cultural diversity and equity advisors, counselling, accommodation and welfare services, librarians and student associations.

This guide outlines eight good practice principles (GPPs) for research training managers and higher education institutions to consider in supporting and developing HDR supervisors and candidates. It focuses on issues relating to international HDR candidates, though many of the GPPs are relevant to the research training of all HDRs, regardless of the cultural backgrounds of supervisor and candidate.

This guide is supported by a research digest focusing on reciprocal intercultural supervision of international higher degree research (HDR) candidates. The digest, along with additional guides for candidates and supervisors, are available online at [ieaa.org.au/hdr](http://ieaa.org.au/hdr).

All three guides specifically address the Australian higher education context, and are designed to complement the guidelines and review published by the Australian Council of Graduate Research\(^2\) and the Australian Council of Learned Academies\(^3\).

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1 Treat the academic success and personal wellbeing of international HDR candidates as core business.

- Develop a clear, coordinated, whole-of-university strategy for ensuring that international HDRs have adequate, appropriate support during their candidature.
- Take a coordinated, collaborative approach to providing support for international HDRs that involves all levels responsible for research training and other areas responsible for international candidates, including the international office, Language and Learning (LAL) Support Unit and library.
- Provide integrated support strategies, which encompass all stages of the HDR lifecycle, from pre-enrolment, to transition and induction, milestones, examination and graduation.
- Ensure support for candidates that is both academically and socially integrated into their new environment.
- Provide strong leadership that converts good intentions into real outcomes for international HDRs.

2 Clearly articulate a strategic commitment to reciprocal intercultural supervision as a venue for transformative learning for all candidates, supervisors, disciplines and the university.

- Ensure that strategic plans for research training at the institutional and disciplinary levels articulate a vision for, and definition of, reciprocal intercultural supervision which:
  - Recognises international candidates’ diversity.
  - Recognises and builds upon the value of transnational intellectual capital – the new international and intercultural knowledge, skills and connections made possible by the presence of international HDRs.
  - Values student empowerment and agency, mutual understanding, respect, cultural sensitivity, reciprocity, hospitality and empathy.
- Invite input from all stakeholders in strategic planning for research training, including HDR candidates (local and international), supervisors, all levels of research training management, international offices, Language and Learning (LAL) Support Units and library.
- Showcase and promote the benefits of having international HDRs, including their transnational and intercultural capital, to the wider institutional community.
Support supervisors of international HDR candidates to participate in professional development for intercultural supervision.

- Provide supervisors with appropriate opportunities to participate in ongoing professional development (PD) for supervising international HDRs.
- Ensure that your institution’s PD program for supervisors is designed to:
  - support reciprocal intercultural supervision, including consideration of power dynamics between candidate and supervisor; raises awareness of culturally embedded approaches to learning and teaching; and develops supervisors’ openness to unfamiliar, new knowledge and the contestation of accepted knowledge.
  - address specific ways to engage international candidates’ intellectual and intercultural resources in making original contributions to knowledge and advancing research in their disciplines.
  - include specific training for supervising candidates who speak English in addition to their first, and possibly other languages.
  - foster supervisors’ self-awareness of their cultural backgrounds and values and expectations and how these shape their practice of HDR supervision.
- Ensure that the institution’s professional development program is framed by an understanding of international students’ cross-border mobility, which is dynamic, evolving and multi-directional.
- Ensure that the institution’s professional development program frames supervision as a relationship in which supervisors and candidates can learn from each other.
- Recognise and reward excellence in supervision of international candidates.
- Include international and domestic candidates’ input in the development, implementation and review of professional development programs for supervisors.

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Provide opportunities for HDR candidates, supervisors and the wider university to generate, share and benefit from the presence of international HDR candidates.

- Ensure that international and local HDR candidates are represented in the institution’s governance of research and research training.
- Provide opportunities for international HDR candidates to contribute to teaching and other research activities and events where relevant.
- Support, recognise and reward HDR candidates’ initiatives to foster learning communities, which bring local and international HDRs together.
- Support appropriate representation of international HDRs at institutional postgraduate research conferences, travel grants and all other institutionally supported programs for HDR research dissemination.
- Provide opportunities for reciprocal cultural and language learning that specifically includes HDRs and staff with multilingual capabilities.

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Recognise the diversity of international HDR candidates and plan to address the learning needs of each candidate.

- Encourage supervisors and schools/departments to consider the needs and interests of international HDRs – as individuals – at each stage of candidature. This needs assessment should take into account the individual candidate’s cultural and linguistic background, their English language proficiency, previous educational experience and pedagogical traditions, personal and economic situation, motives and objectives for undertaking a PhD, and their intended outcome.
- Acknowledge and take into account each candidate’s obligations to their sponsor back home, relationships with the diaspora community in the host country and how these are connected to their future professional pathways.
- Understand and address the potential need for international HDRs to make multiple cultural and personal adjustments – to a different academic culture in Australia, possible return visits home, including the conduct of field research in their home country, and writing their thesis so that it meets expectations of examiners, sponsors and potential or current employers in their home country.
- Ensure your institution has established culturally sensitive mediation and complaint processes, that can be accessed by supervisors and candidates when they have concerns.
Develop a relationship between the institution and international candidates prior to their enrolment.

- Ensure that marketing material gives prospective candidates realistic expectations about their academic and social experience at the institution, including opportunities for employment, housing and social and academic support.

- Encourage supervisors to engage with prospective international HDRs prior to their arrival so that supervisors can supplement the information provided by the institution with information tailored to their social and academic needs, interests, cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

- Develop guidelines, in consultation with all stakeholders, for the assessment of applications from prospective international HDRs, that recognise their linguistic, cultural, social and academic needs. Be prepared to revise guidelines based on evidence to ensure they are fit for purpose.

Recognise the contribution international HDRs have made to the intellectual and cultural life of the university and their discipline.
Recognise the contribution international HDRs have made to the intellectual and cultural life of the university and their discipline, during their candidature and at their graduation.

Support international HDRs’ transition to post-graduate work and life, whether they remain in their host country, return to their home country, or go to a third country. Where applicable, this should include help in preparing for re-entry challenges.

Encourage supervisors and their faculties to take an active interest in the career development of international HDR candidates, including discussion about country specific labour market information for HDR graduates.

Support international HDRs in maintaining their personal/professional connections in their home country while in Australia.

Provide international HDRs with information about international alumni and encourage them to join and alumni groups when they graduate.

Foster the active participation of newly graduated HDRs to actively contribute to alumni groups.

Ensure a coordinated approach to providing English language and learning support, which includes the research training division, faculty leadership and administration, supervisors and candidates, as well as specialised academic language and learning advisers.

Provide international HDR candidates with contextualised support to develop English for academic, social, and where relevant, professional purposes, early on and throughout the candidature.

Provide multiple opportunities for international HDR candidates to use and practice English for academic, social, and where relevant, professional purposes.

Design and support programs which foster interaction between local and international HDRs.

Provide multiple opportunities for candidates to develop broader transferable skills as ‘a necessary aspect of HDR training’.

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