

MQ HDR Good Practice An Overview of Institutional and Divisional Practices 2008

Since commencement of the *HDR Candidature Management Project: Improving the first year research experience* in 2003, the University has introduced many changes for more effective HDR candidature management. Divisions have also refined their HDR policies and practices in response to student feedback and the changing HDR environment.

The effects of these changes on the commencing research experience have been documented in the reports of the *Improving the first year research experience* project each year, and in the HDR Good Practice examples tabled for the HDRC and available on the HDRO website.

This document highlights selected institutional and divisional HDR practice examples of MQ HDR quality practices.

In recognition of the strengthened HDR support, Divisions were each invited to submit one example of their HDR good practice. The examples submitted by Divisions:

- were introduced in 2006 or earlier;
- relate to any aspect of HDR practice, administration, supervision or HDR student candidature stages;
- should be documented (e.g. written guidelines, policy);
- should include information on monitoring or evaluating the effectiveness of the chosen practice and any further improvements which are proposed.

The sections below provide MQ's first overview of institutional and divisional good HDR practice. The selected examples are:

Institutional Good Practice

1. Divisional Funding Model for HDR

2. Central Commencement Program (CCP)

Selected Divisions – HDR Good Practice Examples

1. Divisional Commencement Program: HDR Work-in-Progress Seminars

Division of Humanities

2. Academic Writing Support: HDR Student English as a Second Language and Thesis Writing

Division of Law

3. HDR Support Programs

Division of Economics and Financial Studies

4. Fostering an HDR Research Culture: HDR Research Festival

Division of Linguistics and Psychology

5. HDR Progress Monitoring

Division of Environmental and Life Sciences

6. HDR Completions Workshop: On the path to submission

Division of Society, Media, Culture and Philosophy

7. Selection of High Quality HDR Examiners

Division of Information and Communication Sciences

The final section flags areas for future institutional and divisional good practice examples.

Institutional Good Practice Examples

1. Divisional Funding Model for HDR

1. Goal

To provide a transparent and accountable method of supporting Divisions and candidates in their HDR costs.

2. Context

Prior to 2004 the financial support available to HDR students and their projects was variable and generally ambiguous across the University. Further, feedback from focus groups with commencing students indicated that many HDR students had not considered the costing of their research, nor were they aware of the funds available within their Divisions to facilitate their research. The introduction of the Divisional Funding Model was a direct endeavor to address the financial support needs of HDR students and their Divisions in a consistent and visible manner through the funding of direct research costs and the provision of adequate supervision. This funding model is in addition to the University's Postgraduate Research Funding (PGRF) scheme and the provision of scholarships (MQRES) for HDR.

3. Practice

The HDR Funding Model allocates the Commonwealth government's RTS funding together with international fee income subsidised by a significant institutional component. There are three cost bands, calculated on a weighted equivalent full time student unit (WEFTSU) basis, as well as a separate student completion payment. The value of a WEFTSU varies from year to year, but in 2008 is \$3,250. Using this figure, for a full-time PhD student the maximum payments under the DFM are:

Cost Band	WEFTSU	Division funding per annum	Total 4 yr PhD to Division	Completion WEFTSU	Total with completion
Low	4.5	\$14,625	\$58,500	10	\$91,000
Medium	6.0	\$19,500	\$78,000	10	\$110,500
High	7.5	\$24,375	\$97,500	10	\$130,000

The funding model treats domestic and international student enrolments equally. Annual payments are not made for out-of-time students.

There are specific guidelines to Divisions for the expenditure of the annual HDR funding:

- At least 25% of the total HDR funding needs to be spent on the direct support of HDR student project costs
- No more than 50% of the total HDR funding is to be spent on the provision of supervision
- The balance of funding may be used by Divisions for support of relevant technical/administrative staff and other infrastructure costs.

The annual direct support component of the funding is managed by each Division, and Divisional practices include the establishment of individual student accounts for expenditure, and/or competitive and other grant schemes.

All HDR students are made aware of the funding available to support their research through the Central Commencement Program and their Divisional Commencement Program. The policy is

also detailed in the *Higher Degree Research Guide for Candidates and Supervisors* in booklet form and on the HDRO website.

4. Implementation

Each Division has an HDR Director (Academic) or Associate Dean HDR, as well as a Divisional HDR Administrator, to support the implementation of the DFM and associated funding.

5. Evaluation

Deans of Division are required to report directly to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) on the expenditure of these HDR funds. In addition HDR student feedback is collected through focus group feedback from commencing HDR students (2004-2007) and through the annual HDR student experience survey (MUSEQ-R). In each case, the feedback is analysed with a report and recommendations presented to the Higher Degree Research Committee.

The experiences of each annual cohort are compared with those of previous years to determine progress and satisfaction levels. HDR student feedback has enabled MQ to refine its policy (e.g. equal funding for domestic and international students) as well as guide the Divisions in the implementation of their funding approach for HDR students. From the commencement of candidature all students have become more aware of the funds they have available for their research, and encouraged them to budget and cost their research program accordingly.

2. Central Commencement Program (CCP)

1. Goal

To provide commencing HDR students with an introduction to University-wide resources and requirements for HDR candidates, thus enabling a smooth transition into HDR at Macquarie University.

2. Context

An effective HDR commencement and transition into the subsequent research stages are critical. Focus group feedback from commencing HDR candidates in 2003 highlighted many information gaps. There was variability in the effectiveness and consistency of information provided to students within and across the Divisions. The introduction of the CCP was a direct attempt to address the basic informational needs of first year HDR students and enable a successful transition into HDR and completion.

3. Practice

The CCP is a compulsory one day program offered at the beginning of each semester. It provides commencing HDR students with an overview of research at MQ, an introduction to key members of the University community, and an opportunity to meet their peers. If students are unable to attend, the information is also available as an on-line program. The *Higher Degree Research Guide for Candidates and Supervisors* provides complementary information for all candidates attending the CCP, and is also on-line on the HDRO website.

The CCP is also complemented by commencement programs run at divisional and departmental levels, which provide the discipline-specific information and practices for HDR students. The Divisional Commencement Program (DCP) is also a mandatory part of the first year of candidacy, providing opportunities to explore research methodologies where appropriate and to interact with researchers, and to participate in research seminars.

Completion of the CCP and the DCP are required for the confirmation of candidature.

4. Implementation

The CCP is organized by the Dean HDR. The program (see appendix) includes senior staff and key personnel connected with HDR student matters.

5. Evaluation

HDR students provide feedback on the CCP program to enable improvements to be made to the program and to ensure that the sessions continue to meet commencing HDR student needs (e.g. an expanded treatment of Ethics). Feedback was initially provided (2004-2007) through focus groups with commencing HDR students. From 2006 CCP participants completed an evaluation form on the individual sessions and the overall program. The response rate to the formal evaluation has ranged from 58% to 85%. The student feedback is analysed and a report with recommendations is presented to the Higher Degree Research Committee following each CCP.

Findings from the annual focus groups (2004-2007) showed that the CCP resolved the issue of information gaps for commencing HDR students. The formal CCP evaluations since 2006 show that 90-100% find the CCP program helpful:

The CCP was helpful, it got me motivated and helped me to plan my PhD and think about things. [HDR Student 2008 semester 1]

Thank you very much for such a detailed and informative orientation and CCP. It is very useful to us. [HDR Student 2007 semester 2]

The program really made me feel welcome and that the Uni was genuinely concerned for our welfare and progress. [HDR Student 2007 semester 1]

While the aim of the CCP is to provide commencing HDR students with an introduction to the University, research and HDR requirements, it has also had the effect of fostering a stronger institutional research culture. The following quote from a commencing HDR student illustrates this:

I felt that [the CCP] made it very clear that we were part of the wider university research family, Jim Piper made that very explicit, as did the Dean, HDR, so I thought it was great... [P505 Focus Groups 2005]

APPENDIX

Central Commencement Program for New Research Candidates Friday 22nd February, C5C Theatre 1 09.00 – 09.30 Registration – C5C Quad

TIME	MODULE	PRESENTER
	1. Higher Degree Research and Progression	
09.30	Higher Degree Research at Macquarie: Introduction	Professor John Hooper, Dean, Higher Degree Research (HDR)
09.40	Undertaking Research at Macquarie: the early stages	A/Professor Anna Reid, Learning and Teaching Centre
10.10	Understanding Research: a student's perspective	Eric Fassbender, PhD candidate, ICS
10.30	Candidature Management and the HDRO	Anne Thoeming, Manager, HDRO
11.00	BREAK	
	2. University HDR Resources and Services	
11.15	University HDR funding and resources to support HDR research	Dr Peter Freeman, Director, Research Services
11.45	Macquarie University Library resources for your research	Susan Vickery, Manager, Liaison and Research Services Library
12.15	University Counselling and Health Services	Dr Julie Erskine, Principal Counsellor, University Counselling and Health Services
12.30	MUPRA – research candidate peer support	Phil Betts, MUPRA President
12.45	LUNCH	
	3. Research Ethics, Intellectual Property and the Road to Completion	
13.30	Ethics Committee applications and process, and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research	Dr Margaret Stuart, Chair, Human Ethics Committee
14.15	Intellectual Property	Dr Peter Freeman, Director, Research Services
15.00	Preparing a Research Thesis for Completion	Associate Professor Julie Fitness, Acting Dean, Division of Linguistics & Psychology
15.30	The Thesis Examination Process	Professor John Hooper, Dean, HDR
15.45	CCP Student Questionnaire	

Divisional Good Practice Examples

1. Divisional Commencement Program: HDR Work-in-Progress Seminars

Division of Humanities

1. Goal

To improve the research experience of new HDR students in Humanities and to establish an active peer research culture for their candidature.

2. Context

Previous HDR Humanities student responses to questionnaires indicated dissatisfaction with the variety of and discrepancies between the experiences of new HDR students, given different kinds of commencement programs available at departmental level. At an administrative level this also involved duplication of resources, and ambiguity in communications.

3. Practice

From 2004 Humanities established one division-wide “Work-in-Progress” Seminar, held fortnightly. This two hour seminar has a variety of aims:

- Dissemination of core information to students, e.g. central issues in supervision and roles of supervisors and candidates, funding opportunities, ethics issues, research facilities. These are generally standard divisional or university policies and are best covered at this level;
- Introduction to key staff in policy areas, e.g. HDRO Manager, key research staff, key academic staff, key administrative staff;
- Development of the research environment through students presenting brief papers to peers and senior colleagues;
- Development of contacts between students and staff, including social elements of meetings (refreshments and informal chats at end of sessions);
- Monitoring of student concerns and issues, and response to these as they occur.
- From 2007 a student from the previous year re-presented their thesis talk as a model, as part of a peer-based learning practice.

4. Implementation

This practice saves resources, as we do not now have up to eight separate commencement programs running across the Division, with all that inbuilt capacity for inconsistency. The Divisional Director, HDR facilitates or chairs each session, and the HDR administrator liaises with colleagues for expert sessions, providing technical equipment, and room booking.

5. Evaluation

Feedback from HDR student questionnaires has indicated a higher level of satisfaction and a lower level of dissatisfaction with inconsistencies across the Division. For example, in semester one 2006 it was evident that some students were anxious about presentation of their own material in front of others, both in terms of technical and rhetorical presentation. More experienced students were invited to provide presentations geared at sharing ideas and their best practice. This kind of peer-based learning allowed us to turn a weakness into a strength and provide encouragement and support, thus improving the students’ experience and enhancing their capacity for success.

Spin-off sessions have been added in response to student input. For example, in 2008 sessions are scheduled on PhD by publication, and a more in-depth session on the examination process. Student organized groups are also meeting. Results from the first formal evaluation of the DCP (see appendix) will be available later in 2008.

Perhaps the key component of the consolidated Divisional Work-in-Progress Program and its development over the last two years is the growing sense of the Division as a research environment for staff and research students, focusing on shared experiences in a supportive and mutual learning context. As students learn to work with peers across the division and to see themselves as part of the research culture, so staffs get a better sense of the needs and concerns of the students. Students connect with others outside their own disciplines and expand their research awareness. From the outset students are also encouraged to be able to describe their work in non-specialized terms, to make their research accessible, and to begin to think about research funding and grant applications. Managing their candidature starts at the beginning. By attending the sessions of their own students and other students, supervisors are also brought into the broader world of research work by students outside their areas and contribute beyond their own HDR students.

APPENDIX

Division of Humanities – Feedback on the HDR Work-in-Progress Seminars

Dear Research Student,

We value your feedback on the Divisional Commencement Program (DCP). Your input will assist in keeping the DCP responsive to commencing student needs.

This survey is anonymous.

A. *How helpful did you find each of the DCP program sessions? (Please tick the relevant box)*

VH = Very Helpful; **MH** = Moderately Helpful; **LH** = Of Limited Help; **NN** = Not Needed

Presentation Title	VH	MH	LH	NN
1. Introductory Day and Welcome (29 Feb)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Humanities Academic Outreach Librarian	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Funding and Budgets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Copyright	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Effective Communication	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Ethics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Student Presentations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Overall , DCP was...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. Looking back, what would you have liked to hear about that was not included in the DCP?

10. Do you have any other comments on the DCP?

B. *To help us plan for future student presentations, please tick:*

11. Did you find doing a presentation helpful for developing your thesis ideas? Yes No

12. Did you find listening to other students presenting helpful? Yes No

13. Do you prefer to have student presentations as:
A Full day session Yes No
or
Fortnightly shorter sessions Yes No

Please comment:

C: Some feedback on your early candidature:

14. Do you feel part of the Dep's /Div's research culture? Yes No
15. Are you receiving information on conferences, training sessions, etc? Yes No
16. Do you feel that you have been supported by the Division in the commencement of your HDR? Yes No

D: Supervision

17. Do you have a Principal supervisor? Yes No
18. Do you also have one or more associate supervisor/s, co-supervisor/s or adjunct supervisor/s? Yes No Not sure

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire.

IF YOU DID NOT RETURN THIS SURVEY AT THE END OF THE PROGRAM, PLEASE MAIL IT TO:

Ms Hannah Choi
Division of Humanities
Macquarie University
NSW 2109

Additional comments:

2. Academic writing support: HDR Student English as a Second Language and Thesis Writing

Division of Law

1. Goals

- To assist HDR candidates from English as a Second Language (ESL) backgrounds to acquire the necessary academic skills and knowledge in English so as to enable them to successfully study at HDR level;
- To complement and support their work in the foundation Legal Research Units 1, 2 and 3 which are compulsory for all HDR candidates in their first two years;
- To equip candidates with an ability to independently evaluate their work and make the necessary language revisions by applying the skills they have learnt from the NCELTR program; and
- To enhance the standard of the legal research writing skills of HDR candidates.

2. Context

This language support initiative was implemented in response to information received from HDR students' annual reviews, meetings with current candidates and discussions with supervisors in the Division of Law. It is an initiative between the Division of Law and the University's National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research (NCELTR).

3. Practice

In 2007 the Division of Law, together with NCELTR, designed and implemented a four-stage approach to provide language development support to both domestic and international ESL HDR candidates who have been determined as requiring assistance.

Stage 1- Language Workshops for Commencing Candidates (Workshops 1-3):

All new ESL candidates are offered a screening program to assess their English language abilities and developmental requirements. They are then allocated to a series of workshops, run by NCELTR, which provide language instruction relevant to legal research writing methods. This is offered in conjunction with the compulsory Legal Research Units 1, 2 & 3, offered in the first year of HDR candidature.

Stage 2 - Language Workshops for Continuing Candidates (Workshops 4-6):

These workshops are offered as a complement to all ESL candidates who are approaching the end of Legal Research 1, to facilitate the submission of their revised research proposals and literature review.

Stage 3 - Language Consultations for Near Submission Candidates:

ESL candidates nearing completion, who have been identified by their supervisors or NCELTR staff involved with them in Stages 1 and 2 as needing assistance, are offered one-on-one consultation sessions with the NCELTR team to look at their writing so far, and assist them with language and thesis structure. This minimizes the need for extensive, expensive professional editing of their work prior to submission and reduces the pressure placed on supervisors to edit language rather than content.

Stage 4 - Review and Further Consultations for Near Submission Candidates:

This stage looks providing the remaining chapters of the thesis and assumes the candidate has already revised and self-edited those chapters based on the feedback given in Stage 3. The

work undertaken by NCELTR at this stage only focuses on structure and language, *and does not extend to professional editing.*

This stage is offered to any ESL candidates on completion of Stages 1-3 on a needs basis, upon the recommendation of their supervisor. The recommendation is then considered by the Dean on a case-by-case basis in determining whether the best course of action at this stage would be to either continue with the NCELTR review or to have the work submitted to a professional editor.

4. Implementation

The program draws on staff resources in both the Division of Law and NCELTR. Within Law the program is monitored by the Director HDR and the HDR Administrator. The Division's HDR allocation provide the financial resources to NCELTR for delivery of the program. The program is costed at each of the four stages and for each of the workshops within stages 1 and 2. Stages 3 and 4 are costed on a per student basis. The costs of the 2008 program are:

Assessments (2 semesters)	\$2100
Stage 1 workshops 1-3	\$2440
Stage 2 workshops 4-6	\$5189
Stage 3 per student	\$ 852
Stage 4 per student	\$1007

5. Evaluation

The Division of Law and NCELTR staff are working together to establish evaluation measures for this program. However, a number of indicators are already available:

- Positive feedback from Law students and staff:

I am a PhD candidate from China now in the final year of my candidature. [The NCELTR teacher] is helping me with thesis writing on a face-to-face basis... I restructured my thesis and rewrote the introduction... my supervisor indicates his happiness with the revised version. I think the language help is constructive and hope it will continue in the future.

I am a first year PhD candidate in the Division of Law, who came from Japan. I am attending the language workshops provided by NCELTR, and find it very helpful for my development of English skills. Their teaching method is brilliant; through the task-based workshop, I was able to understand my weak points in organization clearly. All of these were quite useful to strengthen my writing skills.

- Positive feedback from thesis editors:

The transformation of the work since that initial draft is amazing. From an almost incoherent and unstructured document the work has been transformed with the help of your language experts to a beautifully structured and clearly expressed thesis... the end result is a thesis that is a credit to [the student] and the Department. The arguments unfold logically and are explained clearly, while retaining [the student's] personal and appealing style." [Professional Editor, Anne Cullinan, October 2007]

3. HDR Support Programs

Division of Economics and Financial Studies (EFS)

1. Goal

To enhance the EFS HDR experience through improved research methods training, academic writing and administrative support resulting in increased on-time completions of highly skilled, satisfied graduates.

2. Context

Few EFS HDR students complete on-time, with some substantially over the four year time threshold for full-time enrolment. Although the reasons are multifaceted, EFS has identified three critical issues to address, some unique to the Division and others more generic. All commencing HDR students must make an academic cultural shift from coursework based study to research led scholarship. As few graduate coursework students undertake research intensive study, there is little understanding of the requirements and processes involved. New HDR students do not know what is expected, which typically results in a slow start with insufficient progress made in the first year of study. A second reason for low completion rates is insufficient research methods training. The MUSEQ-R HDR 2007 Student Survey results highlight this weakness, with low satisfaction reports regarding appropriate training in research methods. Only 56% of EFS HDR students are satisfied with research training. The final issue, perhaps unique to EFS, is that the majority are international students with English as their second or third language. While most HDR students find their experience challenging and rewarding, most also acknowledge that it is a very lonely and stressful time. International students are particularly vulnerable, as they are cut off from their support networks. Not only are international students, like other HDR students, anxious about their studies, they are working in a different language and typically have added financial pressures.

To address these issues, EFS has identified the following specific needs: 1) increased academic writing and administrative support, including two full-time positions to manage HDR student needs and assist in academic literacy; 2) a commencement program outlining clear expectations and milestones for HDR students to accomplish within the first year of study and to assist in the development of peer networks; and 3) improved research training opportunities through a research design module together with specialized analytic workshops.

3. Practice

Administration Support. Two full-time positions now support EFS HDR students.

1) HDR Administrator (HDRA) – is the interface between the MQ administration and EFS and first point of contact regarding HDR matters. HDRA is responsible for:

- processing all HDR forms including: applications, scholarships, annual reports and funding requests (e.g., conference travel, fieldwork expenses, equipment).
- organising workspace, computers, email accounts and business cards for HDR students.
- arranging HDR events (e.g., HDR Welcome, Protocols, EXPO, Careers in Focus).
- compiling reports and managing databases (e.g., financials, completion dates).
- informing HDR students of the processes involved throughout their candidature and scheduling required tasks (e.g., Protocols, PGRF interviews).

2) Academic Writing Specialist (AWS) – provide workshops and individual consultations.

AWS is responsible for the following:

- coordinating EFS HDR Commencement Week, to facilitate the induction of new HDR students into the Division's academic community (see details below)

- offering workshops (e.g., Thesis Management, Ethics Approval, Presentation & Interviewing Techniques, Mock Protocols, and PGRF Grant Writing)
- developing and implementing the Transition To Research (TTR) program to assist new HDR students adjust to the academic, linguistic and cultural conventions of research (see details below)
- running bi-weekly Writing Groups for continuing research students
- designing initiatives (e.g., peer accountability groups: Mind Your Own Thesis)
- advising individual HDR students on academic literacy and candidature management.

Research Training. The HDR commencement program is in place, research modules and workshops are available and EFS research EXPO completes each year.

1) Commencement Program

- **Commencement Week** – workshops and training sessions at the start of the year coordinated by AWS (e.g., MQ Library, Long Document Formatting, Database Searching, Bibliographic Tools, Surviving Your Thesis, Being Your Own Boss).
- **Transition To Research (TTR)** – 12 week program to develop HDR student academic literacy skills, coordinated by AWS (e.g., Critical Reading & Reviewing Literature; Writing Abstracts & Journal Articles; Giving Presentations; Conferences) and to introduce research methods (e.g., Qualitative & Quantitative Analyses)
- **Protocol** - after 6 months FTE study, HDR students are assessed by an academic panel. HDR students submit a written research paper and make a presentation outlining the scope and direction of their research, planned methodology, timetable and budget.

2) Continuing Research Training

- **Research Design Module** – an intensive research unit detailing standard methods and analyses (e.g., survey design, focus groups, case studies, basic statistics)
- **Analytic Workshops** – specialty units are offered for advanced training (e.g., NVivo, Social Network Analysis, Advanced Excel, Structural Equation Modeling)

3) **EXPO** – provides EFS HDR students with the opportunity to present their research to colleagues in a supportive environment. Presentations may be completed as scholarly papers or works in progress, addressing substantive, theoretical, or methodological topics.

4. Implementation

In addition to the two FTE administration positions, an Associate Dean HDR plus involvement of other academics (workload = 1 FTE position) are required to manage, coordinate and deliver the initiatives. Additional costs include: seminar rooms, computer facilities, software, and consultant fees for specialty courses.

5. Evaluation

Verification of increased on-time completions is not possible until 2010. At this stage, participation and informal evaluations indicate positive responses to the initiatives. Most HDR students pass Protocol, present at EXPO and take part in workshops. Additionally, most commencing HDRS have completed TTR. In response to feedback, the intensive research design module has been developed and will run in second semester 2008.

4. Fostering an HDR Research Culture: HDR Research Festival

Division of Linguistics & Psychology:

1. Goal

To have every Higher Degree Research student, from the first year of candidature, present his or her research plans and progress to students and staff from across the Division. The Research Festival provides a motivating and supportive forum within which HDR students can network with their peers, and obtain constructive feedback from established researchers in their field.

2. Context

The idea of holding an annual Research Festival developed in response to a number of issues that had been identified as problematic for HDR students across the Division. In particular, students frequently reported that they felt isolated and unaware of what other students were doing or how their research was progressing. They wanted more feedback from experts in research methodologies and data analytic techniques; they wanted to feel part of a thriving and vibrant research culture; and they wanted practice in presenting their work in the context of a conference and to gain experience in answering questions about their work and thinking ‘on their feet’. Finally, students wanted to be able to mark their annual progress through their degrees with a combined challenge and celebration; to have a concrete goal to strive towards each year, and to experience the rewards of having achieved that goal. This is especially important during the middle phase of HDR degrees when students can feel bogged down and unclear about their direction.

3. Practice

The Research Festival was implemented in 2003 and has grown and thrived since then. The organizing committee consists of a band of dedicated and hard-working HDR students who hand on their experience each year to a new cohort. Each year sees improvements to the way the Festival is run, in line with student and staff evaluations and feedback. In 2007, the Festival ran over two days (Thursday 7th and Friday 8th December) and included a number of E-presentations from overseas students. Three parallel paper sessions were run each day, with each student formally presenting a paper for 15 minutes, and answering questions/fielding discussion for a further 5 minutes. Morning/afternoon teas and lunches were fully catered and well-attended, as was the MUPRA-sponsored cocktail party on Thursday evening. Prof. Max Coltheart also ran a very well-attended workshop on the PhD process entitled “From Go to Whoa” on Friday morning. An innovation this year was the inaugural Divisional HDR Excellence Awards, established by the Divisional HDR Committee to recognize outstanding research achievements by currently enrolled HDR students. Three awards were made in 2007 and were presented by the Vice Chancellor at the Opening Ceremony on Thursday morning.

4. Implementation

Running the Research Festival primarily requires energy and commitment from the student organizers, co-operation from staff and students with respect to organizing the time-table; and a financial commitment from the Division to cover expenses (catering, production of the printed program, etc.) The costs are budgeted for in line with the University requirement that 25% of our funding should be used to support HDR students and their research.

5. Evaluation

Although participation in the Festival is a compulsory requirement of satisfactory HDR progress within the Division, there is no doubt that the vast majority of students find it a highly rewarding and intrinsically motivating experience. Students are asked to complete evaluation

forms at the end of the conference and data collected so far for the 2007 conference has been extremely positive. The Festival attracts a wide range of staff members who make valuable contributions throughout, and a number of Honours students have also attended.

More than any other Divisional HDR initiative so far, this Festival has been extraordinarily successful in encouraging students and staff to communicate and collaborate with one another. The standard of student presentations is first class and several students have commented on how the Festival has built their confidence and enabled them to present their work at prestigious international conferences. The social side of the Festival is also extremely important, with students and staff spending lots of time together, enjoying good food, good company, and good ideas. Overall, the Festival sets a challenging but very worthwhile goal for students and it is a wonderful chance for staff to appreciate just how good they are.

5. HDR Progress Monitoring:

Division of Environmental and Life Sciences (ELS)

1. Goal

To monitor and support HDR candidates' progress towards on-time completion.

2. Context

Most departments in the Division have in place a process of regular annual or semester progress monitoring in which the targets and timelines set by HDR students in consultation with their supervisors are reviewed. Students are provided with the opportunity of reflecting on their own progress and academic staff provide advice and assistance to achieve the goals. This practice was initiated in the Graduate School of the Environment (GSE) more than fifteen years ago. Biological Sciences have also had annual progress monitoring in place for many years, with an associated postgraduate symposium, and other departments have recently followed suit. This reflects the Division's long-established proactive approach to research and research students.

3. Practice

The key features of HDR progress monitoring are:

1. An annual or semester written progress report. In some departments, a pro-forma is provided (see the GSE HDR Student Review pro-forma attached; a similar pro-forma is used in the divisional HDR student review). Students list targets for the semester; indicate whether they were achieved; and provide explanations for missed goals. They also set targets for the next semester. Supervisors provide written comments by way of clarification and/or endorsement.
2. An annual or biannual interview. Students discuss their progress with a panel of academic staff, including the Principal Supervisor, Associate, Co- and/or Adjunct Supervisor (if available) and the departmental HDR co-ordinator plus other academic staff. Students are encouraged to elaborate on their targets and to draw attention to any aspects of their candidature, project, or personal life that might be affecting their ability to achieve their goals. They also have the opportunity to comment on supervision without supervisors being present.
3. In some departments an annual seminar forms part of the progress monitoring framework; in others, the annual seminar is directed at improving research communication skills, and students are asked to present on an interesting aspect of their research, not just their progress to date.
4. Feedback: Students receive written feedback on their progress from the panel.
5. Ongoing support and monitoring: In cases where significant issues are identified that are impinging on progress, a program of support for the student and regular review throughout the next semester or year is implemented.

4. Implementation

HDRS progress monitoring requires a significant level of resources (mostly staff and student commitment) to make it a success, as follows:

1. Preparation and notification to students and supervisors of progress monitoring timetable, including dates for submission of written progress report to supervisors and then to departmental co-ordinator, and dates for progress interviews and seminars.

2. Preparation of program for seminars and interviews, usually done by the departmental HDR co-ordinator and/or the Executive Officer.
3. Academic staffs attend seminars (3 or 4 days per year) and interviews (up to 2 days per year) and provide feedback to students through written assessment of their seminars and comments in interviews.
4. Departmental HDR co-ordinators provide written feedback to students on the front page of their progress report.

5. Evaluation

Evidence for the success of this practice is in the relatively high on-time completions and relatively low attrition rate achieved by the Division. ELS has the highest number of HDR completions for 2001 to 2005 (173/627 or 27.59%) and the second lowest attrition rate (21%) across the university. While not the only factor contributing to this level of success, regular progress monitoring and close management of HDR students is critical to achieving a high level of on-time completions.

HDR students themselves provide evidence for the success of this practice. There is 100% compliance with the requirements of progress monitoring every semester. Most students comment favourably on the value of being required to set targets and timelines from the outset, and of regular reflection on their progress, and how these requirements are helping them progress with their research. They also appreciate that their progress is closely monitored and that they have an opportunity to talk about their work, to receive a sympathetic hearing, and to have any problems promptly resolved. The fact that there is a system in place to deal with emerging issues/problems is one of the strongest features. In an oblique way it provides a sense of security to the research students. The fact that other academic staff, who are not the students' supervisors, make an active contribution provides a basis for appropriate checks and balances that enables the department to address broader concerns as they arise.

Tangible achievements for the Half

Written papers (List in order: published, accepted, submitted. For each give authors, title, journal and status. For submitted mss, give date of submission)

Oral papers (List in order: presented, accepted by organisers, offered to conference. For each give authors, title, name of conference, place and date of conference.)

Community service (Talks to local groups, schools, etc.) For each give title of talk, name of group, and date.

Consulting relevant to your research. (List the client, and name of each job. How is it relevant to your research?)

Any other achievements (List any other **tangible** achievements e.g. grants received, etc. not covered above. Use additional page if necessary)

6. HDR Completions Workshop: On the Path to Submission

Division of Society, Media, Culture & Philosophy (SCMP)

1. Goal

To prepare HDR candidates, who are either planning to submit or are in the final stages of their research degree, for their thesis submission, the examination process and for starting an academic or a research career.

2. Context

The MUSEQ-R feedback indicated that more advanced candidates required additional support. Additionally, the Division is conscious of the need to assist candidates targeted for completion in the final stages of their projects.

3. Practice

This workshop was initiated in 2008 and was designed to last for half a day. It included sessions on selecting and nominating examiners, the thesis submission process, the examination process, publishing your thesis and post-PhD careers. The sessions were presented by divisional staff as well as the Dean HDR and staff from the HDRO. The workshop was advertised generally within the Division to HDR students and candidates nearing completion were personally invited to attend.

4. Implementation

An HDR Administer/Coordinator makes the arrangements for the program. Speakers from various areas are also needed to speak on their areas of expertise. In addition, Divisional funds need to be allocated for the venue and catering.

5. Evaluation

20 HDR students attended the initial workshop: of which half were in their final stages. Those attending were asked to complete a feedback questionnaire and 17 attendees responded (see appendix). The workshop was well received with survey results indicating that 41% of respondents were very satisfied and 59% of respondents were satisfied with the workshop. None of the respondents indicated that they were not satisfied with the program. In addition, 88% of the respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the range of topics that were covered. 12% of respondents provided areas of interests that they wish to see in future programs.

The results of the evaluation and a follow-up discussion by Departmental HDR Candidate Representatives showed that a number of respondents felt that the program could be expanded to a whole day program and that it should be provided to commencing and progressing HDR students as well as supervisors. Some suggestions on possible topics such as how to manage personal and professional life and how to write an academic CV, were raised and have been taken into consideration for future workshops.

APPENDIX SCMP HDR Student Feedback

Completions Workshop: On the Path to Submission

The results of the survey on the first completions workshop are reproduced below:

1. How did you find out about the workshop?
 - Most identified email as the source. Others stated that they received news from their supervisors or the Dept. HDR Rep.
2. Were you satisfied with the range of issues covered?
 - 15 out of 17 said yes
 - 2 out of 17 said no; the workshop was too long, should have covered the writing of academic CVs
3. Which issue covered was of most interest to you?
 - Selecting your examiners → 6/17
 - The examination process → 8/17
 - Submitting your thesis → 2/17
 - Preparing for last 6 months → 1/17
 - Publishing your thesis → 5/17
 - Life after research → 6/17
 - All → 4/17
4. Were there other issues that you would have preferred to be covered?
 - How to balance family, relationships and research
 - Visa extension
 - How to write CVs/resumes
 - Take into consideration HDR students who are also casual teachers and develop a plan for them
 - How to manage supervisor/candidate relationships
 - How to deal with supervisor/student conflicts
 - How to find proofreaders or people to help out with layouts
5. Overall, how satisfied were you with the workshop?
 - Not satisfied → 0
 - Satisfied → 10/17
 - Very satisfied → 7/17
6. Do you have any general suggestions for how the workshop might be improved?
 - Provide email list of other research students
 - Provide session on how to deal with personal issues during your candidature and completion
 - Have shorter program
 - Include lunch/ meal
 - Provide the same workshop for commencing and middle stage HDR students
 - Provide the same workshop for HDR students at least 12 months before they plan to submit
 - Provide a thesis format template.
 - Provide better advertisements
 - Provide session on how to write CVs
7. What did you think about the venue?
 - Good → 16/17
 - Not good → 1/17

7. Selection of High Quality HDR Examiners

Division of Information & Communication Sciences (ICS)

1. Goal

To ensure the highest international standards in PhD projects through examination by high quality external examiners, and to graduate PhDs of high quality.

2. Context

Nomination of high quality HDR examiners developed due to the widely recognized emphasis on research quality across the division. With increasing student (and supervisor) numbers, there is a need to maintain this practice as a key element of the Division's research culture.

3. Practice

1. Supervisors and candidates discuss 5-6 best available examiners; examiner's international reputation, expertise and academic experience are given high priority. (Supervisor selects up to 6 examiners from this list). In most cases, 75% of nominated examiners are international.
2. The HDR Director assesses the suitability of the examiners and gives feedback to staff where necessary.
3. The MQ Program and Examination Sub-committee of the HDRC checks the status of the examiners before recommending appointment to HDRC.

4. Implementation

1. As the supervisor numbers increase, we will use supervisor training sessions and web resources to pass this practice to new supervisors and early career supervisors.
2. Communication between the supervisor and the HDR Director/Administrator is required when there is a concern about a nomination.
3. Some international examiners are not aware of or familiar with the MQ (i.e. Australian) system of thesis examination in which there are no oral examinations. This needs to be conveyed clearly to the examiners by the supervisor.

5. Evaluation

1. Recent HDRO data indicates that ICS nominates the highest fraction of international examiners (73% compared with MQ average of 51%).
2. Most of the nominated examiners from academia have appointments at higher levels (Level C and above).
3. A vast majority of examiners reports:
 - a. are of high quality;
 - b. provide useful feedback to the candidate; and
 - c. are helpful to the process of making a decision on the thesis by HDRC.

The challenge is to preserve those practices in a period of rapid expansion of HDR students.

8. Possible Future Examples

1. Effective University HDR Student Management – HDRO
2. Effective Committee Operation: The Higher Degree Research Committee (HDRC) and the Program, Examination and Scholarship Sub-committee (PESC).
3. Internationalisation of HDR Experience: GEMOC and Cotutelle PhD – ELS;
4. Divisional Commencement Program and Skill Development Courses – ICS;
5. Grant Application Training: Postgraduate Research Fund (PGRF) – ICS;

All Divisions are invited to submit further examples of their good practice on the pro-forma for consideration for inclusion in this document.

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4 July 2008