Higher Degree by Research Policy

Section 1 - Preamble

(1) Charles Darwin University ('the University', 'CDU') is committed to providing an environment that enables and supports transformative education through higher degrees by research (HDR) and drives world-class research in areas critical to the sustainable and prosperous development of Northern Australia and the wider region.

Section 2 - Purpose

(2) This policy serves as an overarching framework to manage the HDR courses at the University. This policy integrates other procedures around the admission, enrolment, support, internship, training, supervision, appraisal, and examination of HDR candidates.

(3) The practices and principles that underpin this framework policy are consistent with obligations within the Australian Qualifications Framework and the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 as well as compatible with the Australian Council of Graduate Research Good Practice Principles.

Section 3 - Scope

(4) This policy applies to all HDR courses, candidates enrolled in HDR courses, and University staff responsible for supporting HDR candidates and courses.

Section 4 - Policy

Admissions and Enrolment

(5) To be admitted into an HDR course:

a. applicants must demonstrate they have the capabilities to complete research at the corresponding Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) level; and
b. the University must be able to supply the resources, support and supervision to enable applicants to complete the proposed research.

(6) Admission into an HDR course is governed by the Higher Degree by Research - Admission and Enrolment Procedure.

(7) To be enrolled into a HDR course:

a. candidates must have organised one principal supervisor and at least one Associate Supervisor in accordance with the Higher Degree by Research - Supervision Procedure; and
b. candidates must be allocated to a Faculty or to the Menzies School of Health Research (home faculty), usually the Faculty of their principal supervisor.

(8) Candidates allocated to the Menzies School of Health Research must comply with the policies and procedures of both the University and the Menzies School of Health Research. In certain circumstances these candidates should follow the policies and procedures of the Menzies School of Health Research over those of the University, some of which are noted in this policy.

(9) Each year, Research and Innovation will prompt candidates to enrol or re-enrol into the course.

(10) A candidate can transfer to another home faculty if approved by this home faculty and if beneficial to the candidate. This change could be deemed as beneficial if the resources, practices, and priorities of this home faculty closely match the needs of this candidate.

(11) If candidates are not enrolled and have not arranged an approved leave of absence, their candidature will lapse and they will be required to show cause as to why they should be permitted to maintain their enrolment.

(12) Candidates may change some details of their enrolment throughout their course. For example, domestic candidates may change their study to part-time, or apply for leave for a period of time. The process for changing enrolment details is covered by the Higher Degree by Research - Admission and Enrolment Procedure.

(13) Candidates must notify the HDR team at Research and Innovation whenever they change their name, citizenship, residency or any travel overseas (including for holidays or to visit family).

(14) During some or all their candidature, domestic candidates may study externally, located away from the university campus. These arrangements must comply with the Higher Degree by Research - Admission and Enrolment Procedure.

(15) International students will normally be expected to be located in Darwin, or alternatively at the CDU campus where their principal supervisor is based. A student may apply to the Dean of Graduate Studies to study at an alternative campus or location, and approval will depend on individual circumstances and visa conditions.

(16) Candidates may also request to conduct fieldwork overseas. To be successful, this request must be:

a. approved by the principal supervisor and home faculty;
b. consistent with student visa conditions, as advised by CDU Global; and
c. consistent with the University's Travel Policy or the Menzies Travel Policy and Procedure (as applicable).

(17) The normal period for overseas fieldwork is up to 12 months for PhD candidates and up to 6 months for Masters by Research candidates. Further extended periods will be considered subject to approval by the Dean of Graduate Studies and the Associate Dean Research of the home faculty.

Duration of Candidature

(18) The duration of a candidature is between six months and two years full time (between one and four years part-time) for a Masters by Research and six months to four years full time (between one year and eight years part-time) for a PhD. The duration of candidature includes enrolment in previous HDR courses unless:

a. the previous HDR course was completed and awarded; or
b. the previous HDR course was not completed in Australia.

(19) The Dean of Graduate Studies may consider exceptions to the minimum duration of HDR candidature on a case-by-case basis.

(20) In exceptional circumstances, the Research Committee or its working party for HDR candidates' scholarship and candidature extension matters can approve up to six-month extensions at a time to candidature providing:

a. candidates can demonstrate adequate progress and they have completed more than two thirds of their research project; or
b. candidates have completed eligible internships as per the Research Training Program (RTP) internship guidelines.

(21) Extensions to candidature duration will incur further tuition fees unless a waiver is granted by the Research Committee or its working party for HDR candidates' scholarship and candidature extension matters.

Leave Entitlements

(22) Candidates are entitled to up to ten days of sick leave annually. Candidates should not apply to the University for this leave but should notify their principal supervisor. Candidates may apply for further sick leave from their home faculty if they can provide supporting documentation such as medical certificates or a valid Access Plan.

(23) Candidates are also entitled to leave because of jury duty or leave because of domestic violence. Candidates should notify their principal supervisor and provide documentation.

(24) Sick leave, jury leave, or leave because of domestic violence that exceeds one month can extend the date at which the candidature expires. Candidates should apply for leave exceeding one month using the Research and Innovation HDR leave forms.

(25) Candidates are encouraged to arrange 20 days of annual recreation leave if full time and 10 days of annual recreation leave if part time. This annual leave entitlement, however, does not affect the date at which the candidature expires. Candidates should not apply to the University for this leave but should notify their principal supervisor.

(26) If candidates are a primary carer or a partner of a primary carer of a newborn or newly adopted child, or a birthing parent who is due to give birth within 20 weeks, they are eligible to apply for parental leave. Parental leave allows a candidate to suspend their enrolment for up to 12 months.

(27) Candidates may apply to Research and Innovation for a leave of absence, which is a temporary suspension of enrolment. A leave of absence must be less than one year full time in total, across the candidature, excluding parental leave.

(28) Candidates are entitled to suspend their candidature (i.e. internship leave) for participating in eligible internship opportunities. The duration of leave will be the same as the duration of the HDR internship.

(29) A request for a leave of absence must be approved by the Dean of Graduate Studies.

(30) In exceptional circumstances, candidates may receive a leave of absence that exceeds one year if approved by the Research Committee or its working party for HDR candidates' scholarship and candidature extension matters. When candidates are granted a leave of absence, they can still:

a. access their computer account and the library;
b. access their office space to progress their research, with the approval from their home faculty;
c. receive supervision, if their supervisors agree; and
d. analyse data, but not collect data on humans or animals.

(31) The conditions of student visas usually prohibit leave of absences granted to international candidates, except in compassionate or other compelling circumstances. CDU Global will need to approve these requests from international candidates.

Time Commitments

(32) Candidates should dedicate an average of about 40 hours a week to their course if full time and 20 hours a week if part time.

(33) Candidates must seek approval from the Dean of Graduate Studies to study an additional course or unit.

(34) Full-time candidates may be employed up to a maximum of 20 hours per week. Both full-time and part-time candidates must ensure that their work commitments do not interfere with satisfactory study progress and their ability to finish degree requirements within the specified time frame.

(35) International candidates must confirm their eligibility to work under the conditions of their visa with the Australian Government, Department of Home Affairs.

Confirmation of Candidature

(36) Until candidates complete their confirmation of candidature, they are admitted on a probationary basis. To complete the confirmation of candidature, candidates must:

a. develop a supervision agreement in cooperation with their supervisors that stipulates the responsibilities of each party;
b. submit a research proposal that complies with the requirements outlined in the Higher Degree by Research - Progression Procedure; and
c. complete an oral presentation to a confirmation panel.

(37) The Dean of Graduate Studies may waive the Confirmation of Candidature requirement for candidates submitting a thesis by prior publication, and stipulate alternative probationary requirements and milestones for these candidates on admission. Such conditions will be included in the candidate's letter of offer.

(38) The Higher Degree by Research - Progression Procedure stipulates:

a. if and when this confirmation of candidature must be completed;
b. the criteria that candidates must fulfill;
c. the roles of supervisors, home faculties, and Research and Innovation; and
d. the possible outcomes of this confirmation of candidature.

(39) The research that candidates plan to conduct and report in their thesis must be completed while they are enrolled at the University or at another Australian university. The Dean of Graduate Studies may approve exceptions on the condition that:

a. less than one third of this research was completed before the candidates were enrolled at an Australian university; and
b. the candidates received supervision of a similar standard to that provided at CDU; or
c. the candidate is enrolled in a PhD by Prior Publication, which are verified in terms of standards, quality and research and academic integrity during the enrolment process.

(40) During the confirmation of candidature, candidates propose the budget they need to complete their research. If the candidature is confirmed, the home faculty agrees to supply some or all of the requested budget, relative to resources available for HDR support, but are not obliged to pay expenses that exceed this budget. This budget should include the costs of:

a. equipment, consumables, stationary, and software that is not available in the University;

b. courses, conferences, and travel—including occasions in which external students travel to the University; and
c. other expenses, such as editorial services or research participants.

(41) Candidates who have completed a confirmation of candidature at another Australian university or in another HDR course at this University may not need to complete the research proposal or oral presentation again, provided they submit their Supervision Agreement. The Dean of Graduate Studies can waive the research proposal or oral presentation, after consulting the home faculty, if:

a. the candidates can supply a research proposal they had submitted during their confirmation of candidature;
b. this research proposal is comparable in length, scope, and quality to the research proposals that candidates tend to submit at this University;
c. the research plans of these candidates have not changed substantially since their previous confirmation of candidature;
d. the University can supply the resources the candidates need to complete the project within the allocated budget;
e. the proposed research is sufficiently extensive but still feasible within the allocated time; and
f. the supervisors have the expertise that is necessary to help the candidates complete this project.

(42) The confirmation of candidature process must consider compliance with research integrity and the autonomous sanctions and foreign arrangements schemes, where applicable. Where a project is not compliant, confirmation may be withheld.

Supervision, Training and Support

(43) All candidates must be assigned a supervisory panel during their entire candidature. This panel must include one principal supervisor and at least one associate supervisor. It can also include other advisors, such as industry experts. The Higher Degree by Research - Supervision Procedure stipulates the:

a. criteria that staff must fulfill to register as supervisors;
b. responsibilities of these supervisors;
c. criteria of acceptable supervision panels; and
d. procedures around changes to the supervision panel.

(44) The Associate Dean Research:

a. determines whether a research project is feasible;
b. monitors progress over time in conjunction with Research and Innovation;
c. sensitively addresses any challenges of candidates that supervisors cannot resolve; and
d. assists supervisors who are experiencing challenges with particular candidates.

(45) The Associate Dean Research may delegate some of these responsibilities to other academics in the home faculty. The Associate Dean Research may delegate administrative and day to day management of HDR students to an HDR Coordinator/Administrator within the home faculty. If candidates feel their home faculty cannot resolve their concerns, Research and Innovation and the Dean of Graduate Studies may address administrative and academic matters respectively.

(46) Candidates must participate in training and development opportunities to extend their research, personal, and career skills in accordance with the Higher Degree by Research - Progression Procedure. These opportunities may include:

a. workshops, conferences, and other events organised by the University or other entities; and
b. informal opportunities, such as peer discussions and website materials.

(47) Some training activities are compulsory, including induction training and research integrity training as stipulated in the Higher Degree by Research - Progression Procedure.

(48) The home faculty or equivalent must provide the resources and services outlined in the Higher Degree by Research - Minimum Resources Procedure.

(49) Candidates must comply with the University Work Health and Safety Policy or the Menzies Health and Safety Policy as applicable. Supervisors and home faculties must:

a. advise candidates on safety practices that are specific to their research activities;
b. foster a culture that promotes health, safety, and compliance; and
c. report incidents and hazards to Work Health and Safety.

(50) Candidates must comply with the University Travel Policy whenever they undertake travel associated with their research project and research training, including attending conferences and workshops. Candidates with the Menzies School of Health Research must comply with the Menzies Travel Policy and Menzies Travel Health and Safety Policy.

(51) If candidates feel that one of their concerns was not addressed adequately, they can submit a complaint or grievance. Applicants and candidates may also appeal academic decisions that affect their standing or rights—but on procedural grounds only. Complaints, grievances, and appeals should be lodged in accordance with the Complaints Policy - Students.

Responsible Conduct of Research

(52) Candidates must comply with the Responsible Conduct of Research Policy or the Menzies Responsible Research Policy and other applicable codes and governance documents. If research involves collecting data from humans or using animals for scientific purposes, before candidates may start their research activity, they need to seek and maintain clearance from:

a. the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University if their research involves human participants, as defined by the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research;
b. the Animal Ethics Committee at the University if their research involves animals; or
c. the Top End Human Research Ethics Committee for candidates with the Menzies School of Health Research.

(53) Research Integrity Advisors within each home faculty can guide and advise staff and candidates on responsible research practices. Responsible Conduct of Research Procedure details how staff or students can submit an allegation of research misconduct.

(54) Higher degree by research candidates may consider using generative artificial intelligence (gen AI) tools where appropriate. They must first consult with their supervisor on the benefits and risks of using gen AI tools, and develop a plan that outlines how the tool will be used, its intended impact on the research quality and how principles of research integrity will be observed.

Changes During Candidature

(55) Candidates may change their research plans, in consultation with their supervisors and/or the Associate Dean Research, during their candidature, such as the research question, methodology, or methods. Depending on the magnitude of these changes, candidates may need to seek approval from various bodies, such as the ethics committee, in accordance with the Higher Degree by Research - Progression Procedure.

(56) If endorsed by the home faculty, a PhD candidate may apply to transfer their candidature to a Masters by Research either for personal reasons or because this change was recommended by their supervision panel or Associate Dean Research, usually as a consequence of inadequate progress.

(57) The Dean of Graduate Studies may approve this request, especially if the candidate is significantly more likely to complete the Masters by Research, but not the PhD, on time. The date of commencement in the Masters by Research will be backdated to the date the candidate enrolled in the PhD.

(58) If endorsed by the home faculty, a Masters by Research candidate who has not yet submitted their thesis for examination may apply to the Dean of Graduate Studies to upgrade their candidature to a PhD. If the application is approved, the maximum candidature date will be adjusted accordingly. Candidates will also need to demonstrate that:

a. they have completed a research plan that is feasible and appropriate for a PhD;
b. the University can supply the resources, support, and supervision to support this PhD; and
c. the research project can be completed within the maximum duration of the candidature.

(59) International candidates must confirm their eligibility to change their research or enrolment conditions with the Department of Home Affairs. In addition, candidates from a sanctioned nation must receive approval from the head of their home faculty to change their research topic. The head of the home faculty or delegate must ensure any proposed topic complies with autonomous sanctions and foreign arrangements requirements, including:

a. independent confirmation of no military application;
b. transparent and detailed description of methodology; and
c. details of any anticipated collaboration with external parties.

Issues with Progression

(60) To maintain candidature, candidates must fulfill imposed milestones, including progress reviews, during their candidature.

(61) At any time if the home faculty or Dean of Graduate Studies has serious concerns about a student's progress, they may be asked to show cause as to why their enrolment should be maintained.

(62) If, after candidature has been confirmed, candidates fail to complete a milestone in accordance with the Higher Degree by Research - Progression Procedure, they will be asked to show cause as to why their enrolment should be maintained.

(63) Where there are progression concerns a period of probation may be imposed by the home faculty with the approval of the Dean of Graduate Studies. When a probationary period is imposed, the candidates, with the guidance and support of their supervision panel and home faculty, must:

a. within a month full-time equivalent (FTE), devise a revised plan on the activities they will complete to finish their research; and
b. specify how they will manage the past or potential impediments to their progress.

(64) If candidates do not complete this revised plan on time or do not progress adequately they will be required to show cause as to why they should be permitted to maintain their enrolment. Once candidates demonstrate adequate progress, the Dean of Graduate Studies may remove the probation.

(65) If candidates engage in misconduct, they will be invited to show cause as to why they should be permitted to maintain their enrolment. Misconduct includes breaches of the University's Code of Conduct - Students and the Menzies Code of Conduct if applicable.

(66) If candidates lodge an appeal while enrolled, they will remain enrolled until the appeal has been resolved. If an appeal is unsuccessful, the exclusion will begin from the date of this decision.

(67) The University must notify the relevant government authority of the updated enrolment status if the candidate is an international student.

(68) If a candidate wishes to withdraw from their course, they should notify their principal supervisor and home faculty and submit the Withdrawal Form as soon as possible.

(69) If the candidate delays their withdrawal, they may be granted less time to complete another HDR course in future. Candidates may withdraw at any time except while their research is under examination. To prevent potential complications around student visas and tuition fees, international candidates must discuss their intention to withdraw from candidature with CDU Global.

Submission, Examination and Conferral

(70) The University must arrange at least two examiners to evaluate the thesis. The Higher Degree by Research - Preparation, Submission and Examinations Procedure stipulates:

a. the length, format, and contents of a thesis;
b. when and how candidates can submit their thesis;
c. editing and proofing of a thesis;
d. who can examine a thesis;
e. evaluation of a thesis; and
f. responses to evaluations.

(71) During a candidature, tuition, oral presentations, and written submissions will be conducted in English, unless the Research Committee has approved exceptions. To approve these exceptions, the Research Committee will consider whether:

a. the milestones can be evaluated accurately, in accordance with the Higher Degree by Research - Progression Procedure;
b. the candidate can receive adequate support and supervision; and
c. the thesis can be examined, in accordance with the Higher Degree by Research - Preparation, Submission and Examinations Procedure.

(72) If these exceptions are granted, the candidate must submit an abstract as well as an outline of this thesis of approximately 2500 words, written in English, to the satisfaction of the Dean of Graduate Studies.

(73) When a candidate completes the requirements of a PhD or Masters by Research, University Council shall award the qualification. To complete the requirements of a research degree, candidates must:

a. achieve a pass in the examination of their thesis;
b. fulfill the milestones and training requirements that are stipulated in the letter of offer; and
c. supply an electronic copy of the final thesis to the University repository.

Authority to Change Courses

(74) Research and Innovation, alongside the Faculties and the Menzies School of Health Research (home faculties), administer the HDR courses at the University on behalf of the Research Committee. Decisions regarding HDR admission, enrolment, progression, supervision, examination, and completion are not deemed to be final until

notification is received from Research and Innovation.

(75) Establishing and managing a Joint PhD Program, Dual PhD Program, or other collaborative arrangements shall comply with the Higher Degree by Research - Collaborative Course Policy.

(76) If a research degree course is terminated or suspended, arrangements for managing existing candidates must be clearly documented and disseminated to all these candidates. As far as possible, this termination or suspension of the course should not disadvantage existing candidates.

(77) Candidates can continue to enrol in the course until all existing students have completed the course, transitioned, or withdrawn, or for a period that is twice the duration of the full-time maximum period of candidature, whichever is shorter.

Cessation of candidature

(78) Candidature ceases when:

a. a candidate's thesis passes examination in line with the Higher Degree by Research - Preparation, Submission and Examinations Procedure;
b. a candidate voluntarily discontinues their candidature by notifying their home faculty and Research and Innovation in writing; or
c. the University cancels a candidate's candidature for one of the reasons outlined in this policy.

(79) The University may cancel a candidate's candidature:

a. at the culmination of a show cause process in line with the Higher Degree by Research - Progression Procedure;
b. if a candidate on probation does not meet the milestones or conditions of their probationary candidature;
c. for non-compliance with research integrity, autonomous sanctions, and/or foreign arrangements requirements;
d. following a finding of misconduct under the Code of Conduct - Students;
e. when an international student visa holder's confirmation of enrolment has been cancelled;
f. when a supervisory panel that meets the criteria outlined in the Higher Degree by Research - Supervision Procedure cannot be appointed or maintained;
g. when a candidate does not re-enrol and is not on approved leave; or
h. when the candidate has exceeded the maximum duration of candidature, as outlined in the Duration of Candidature section in this policy.

Re-instatement of candidature

(80) Former candidates who wish to re-engage their studies must apply for readmission in line with the Higher Degree by Research - Admission and Enrolment Procedure.

Appeals

(81) An HDR candidate can appeal a termination of candidature in accordance with Step 3 of the Complaints Policy - Students.

Section 5 - Non-Compliance

(82) Non-compliance with Governance Documents is considered a breach of the Code of Conduct - Employees or the Code of Conduct - Students, as applicable, and is treated seriously by the University. Reports of concerns about non-compliance will be managed in accordance with the applicable disciplinary procedures outlined in the Charles Darwin

University and Union Enterprise Agreement 2025 and the Code of Conduct - Students.

(83) Complaints may be raised in accordance with the Complaints and Grievance Policy and Procedure - Employees and Complaints Policy - Students.

(84) All staff members have an individual responsibility to raise any suspicion, allegation or report of fraud or corruption in accordance with the Fraud and Corruption Control Policy and Whistleblower Reporting (Improper Conduct) Procedure.

Status and Details

Status	Current
Effective Date	23rd June 2026
Review Date	13th February 2029
Approval Authority	Vice-President Governance and University Secretary
Approval Date	23rd June 2026
Expiry Date	Not Applicable
Responsible Executive	Steve Rogers Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Community Connection +61 8 89466890
Implementation Officer	Steven Greenland Dean of Graduate Studies
Enquiries Contact	Steven Greenland Dean of Graduate Studies --- Research and Innovation

Glossary Terms and Definitions

"Home faculty" - The Faculty in which a Higher Degree by Research candidate is enrolled. The Menzies School of Health Research is the home faculty for students of Menzies.

"University" - Charles Darwin University, a body corporate established under section 4 of the Charles Darwin University Act 2003. The University is comprised of the various faculties, CDU TAFE, organisational units, and formal committees, including the governing University Council and Academic Board.

"Governance document" - means policy or procedure published in the Governance Document Library. Policies and procedures are collectively called ‘governance documents’ and are often referred to as ‘policy’ or ‘University policy’.