Principles for Joint Higher Degrees by Research

Between

Australian Higher Education Providers

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1 Introduction

1.1 A jointly-awarded Higher Degree by Research (HDR) program allows eligible Masters by Research and Doctorate Research students to be supervised jointly by academics from two different Higher Education Providers (HEPs). Eligible students are normally enrolled concurrently at the two universities for the entire period of their award and must spend at least a total of one year (or one third) of their degree in each university. Upon completion, students are eligible to receive a jointly-badged award.

2 Objectives

2.1 The Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research (DIISR) acknowledges joint HDRs are an important mechanism for Australian HEPs to collaborate in research and research training. Joint HDR awards provide significant benefits to students and HEPs by:

- providing students with opportunities to access specialised and cutting edge equipment and international facilities that they may otherwise be unable to access;
- providing students with a broader academic environment than they would otherwise directly access;
- facilitating cooperation and collaboration of HDR students and researchers working at different institutions and encouraging a greater transfer of knowledge between HEPs;
- providing HDR students in regional areas with limited mobility, greater access to infrastructure support without the need to permanently relocate and;
- potentially strengthening the alignment of research training with areas of identified research strength between HEPs.

2.2 Arrangements for the administration of joint HDR awards are managed by the two partnering HEPs to ensure that a duty of care to the student is maintained.

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1DIISR expects that in the majority of instances, a joint HDR student will be “on leave” from one HEP while active at the other. Guidelines for enrolment processes are outlined at Section 4.3.2.
2.3 This paper has been prepared by DIISR to provide guidance to HEPs entering into agreements for the management and delivery of joint HDR awards. The paper aims to outline the issues that need to be considered by HEPs entering into such arrangement so that they can be confident that the approach they are employing is nationally consistent. However, it is not DIISR’s intention that these guidelines should compromise the flexibility that HEPs currently exercise in negotiating agreements for joint HDR awards.

2.4 Students may transfer between HEPs due to unforeseen circumstances including the movement of supervisors, infrastructure and laboratory equipment. During these changes, each institution is responsible for ensuring that a fair and accurate recognition of investment in the training of the research student is awarded.

2.5 While this document does not provide specific guidance with regards to the issue of unplanned student transfers, it does not preclude HEPs from awarding a joint HDR award in these instances. Should the HEPs involved agree to award a joint HDR under these circumstances, these guidelines may be applied retrospectively, where a student has spent at least a year enrolled at each institution. It remains the responsibility of the HEPs involved in these circumstances to ensure that their duty of care to the student is met.

3 Definitions and Scope

3.1 A joint HDR:
- means a higher degree jointly provided by two HEPs, undertaken by students to achieve a Research Doctorate, including a Professional Doctorate, or Research Masters (as described in the Australian Qualifications Framework and for which at least two-thirds of the student load for the course is required as research work) and;
- where the student spends a minimum time equivalent to the total of one year or one-third full-time candidature over the course of their award enrolled at each HEP.

3.2 A joint HDR is available to both domestic\(^2\) and international\(^3\) students.

4 Requirements for joint institutional agreements on handling

4.1 When entering into arrangements to support the provision of a joint HDR program, HEPs should formally agree on the general conditions that will govern this arrangement, including maintaining a duty of care to the student.

\(^2\) As defined within the Higher Education Support Act 2003
\(^3\) Refers to “Overseas Students” as defined in the Higher Education Support Act 2003
4.2 HEPs should define and set out these overarching principles in a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the relevant providers. At minimum, the MoU should act as a formal agreement between both HEPs to follow the guidelines contained within when entering into joint HDR arrangements. HEPs may also choose to make this agreement legally binding. While in most cases, the agreed MoU will only be between two HEPs, there may be cases where HEPs may enter into a MoU with multiple partners.

4.3 Within the MoU HEPs should agree to the following principles:

4.3.1 The collaborating institutions will jointly award a single degree to a student who participates in a joint HDR;

4.3.2 Each institution must arrange for admission of the student in accordance with their own procedures into a PhD or Masters by Research program. As no element currently exists to capture joint enrolment status within the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations’ (DEEWR) Higher Education Information Management System (HEIMS), HEPs are responsible for managing enrolment status and ensuring a joint enrolment is only reported once. The student should be concurrently enrolled at both HEPs during a joint HDR. However, the student must be only active at one institution, while on leave from the second.

Throughout the student’s enrolment, the conditions and regulations pertaining to candidature of the institution at which the student is currently active should apply. However, in the instance that the conditions of the partnering institution vary, HEPs should identify and resolve this in the initial MoU documents;

4.3.3 Both HEPs should agree on acceptable codes of supervision practice to ensure a duty of care to the student is met. As a minimum, both HEPs involved in joint HDR arrangements should agree to provide at least one supervisor from each institution for the period of the student’s enrolment.

4.3.4 Each collaborating HEP agrees to ensure a student enrolled in a joint HDR will have the same level of access to facilities enjoyed by other students enrolled at that institution. This includes in particular, equivalent access to IT equipment and support.

4.3.5 While the setting of minimum standards is the responsibility of both HEPs during a joint HDR, these standards should be consistent with guidelines issued by state and territory accrediting bodies, including the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) for the receipt of a Masters or Doctorate by Research.

AQF standards include the expectation that a thesis will be subject to external examination to international standards.
4.3.6 Students must be granted access to grievance procedures at the institution in which they are undertaking their current unit of study. The student should also be able to address grievances to their primary institution.

To address concerns of research misconduct and student grievances, HEPs are encouraged to establish a cross-institution program committee. The committee should include representatives from both providers and agree consequences for instances of misconduct and processes to resolve student grievances.

HEPs should specify with students specific processes for the submission of grievances and instances of misconduct between the parties involved.

4.3.7 HEPs must agree to jointly determine and report on the proportion of a successful completion from a joint HDR.

Proportional completions are to be reported yearly as part of all completions reported within the Higher Education Student Data Collection (HESDC) to DEEWR.

From 2012, a new element (578) will be added for reporting to the HESDC, for past course completions submissions. This element will identify the percentage of a course completion in a joint degree that is attributable to each institution.

HEPs will be required to report this element for the first time in 2013, reporting on 2012 data.

Two new elements have been proposed for introduction from 2013 on the Course of Study submission. These will identify joint degrees and partner institutions with whom they are offered.

(For 2012, where a percentage of a course completion is reported, DEEWR will administratively follow up with providers to identify the partner institution offering a joint degree and the course of study for which the completion has been awarded).

4.3.8 HEPs must agree that upon completion of a joint HDR, students will be conferred a single degree under a joint HDR program between both institutions.

4.4 Each collaborative joint HDR programme established under the terms of the MoU, must be subjected to the conditions of a separate individual student agreement between the institutions concerned. Specific items for inclusion or detailed clarification in the agreement would (as a minimum) include the items covered in the MoU and detailed in this section.
4.4.1 Prior to engagement in a Joint HDR arrangement, HEPs must agree and define which provider will act as the primary or ‘home’ institution for the student. In most cases, DIISR expects that the primary institution will be the institution in which the student spends the greater proportion of their study.

HEPs should aim to identify the amount of time that the student will spend at each HEP throughout the course of their HDR. Where possible, an indicative timetable that identifies the enrolment time to be spent at each HEP should be submitted to both providers for agreement prior to commencement of candidature.

4.4.2 Both HEPs must indicate the process that will be used to ensuring the student’s leave entitlements are calculated and apportioned accurately.

4.4.3 The financial arrangements between collaborating institutions for tuition fees, student support and examinations should be stated within each individual agreement.

During a joint HDR, each HEP is responsible for meeting the training costs for the student, for the period of time at which they are enrolled at their institution.

Within an individual arrangement, HEPs should specify the training that will be provided by each HEP. Each institution is responsible for ensuring that they are able to meet the costs of the training of the student.

HEPs are responsible for recovering this funding either directly from the student, or through their Research Training Scheme (RTS) entitlement. Conditions relating to domestic RTS, fee-paying and international students are detailed further below.

**Domestic Commonwealth-assisted (RTS) students**

Under joint HDR arrangements, in the instance that a student has been allocated a Research Training Scheme (RTS) funded place, both HEPs are responsible for meeting the appropriate proportion of the costs of training through their RTS allocation. The amount of support provided by each HEP should be commensurate with the proportional completion reported to DEEWR (see 4.3.7).

Due to the proportional reporting of completions following the student’s graduation, HEPs will be recompensed for this investment in the student’s research training, through the allocation of RTS funding.

HEPs are also responsible for ensuring that a student does not exceed their maximum entitlements for RTS funding (i.e. a maximum of two years funding for a Masters by Research and four years for a Research Doctorate).
Domestic and International Fee-paying students

HEPs are responsible for recovering the costs of full-fee paying domestic and international students throughout the course of a joint HDR. Within the individual agreement, HEPs should specify the fees that will be paid to each HEP by the student.

4.4.4 Funding for Australian Postgraduate Awards (APA) and International Postgraduate Research Scholarships (IPRS) is provided on a per place basis from the Commonwealth to each HEP. This funding is provided over a number of years to ensure that funds are available for scholarships and stipends for the duration of a student’s HDR study.

As per the current Commonwealth Scholarship Guidelines (CSG) (section 2.15.10) HEPs are obligated to support as many APAs as they can support through its APA grant, taking into account any roll-over of grant amounts as provided for in section 46-35 of the Act.

Within the individual student agreement HEPs are required to specify which HEP will fund a student’s APA and/or IPRS funding, should the student be eligible. In the majority of instances the primary HEP will fund the entire scholarship payment for the student. This simplifies funding arrangements by allowing one HEP to fund the total APA or IPRS consistent with funding provided by DIISR, for up to 3 years of full-time study.

It is the responsibility of the primary HEP to recover an appropriate proportion of funding from the partnering HEP for the time that the student is enrolled at that institution. HEPs should specify processes for the recovery of funding for scholarship funding within their MoUs. Through the sharing and reporting of proportional completions once the student completes, both HEPs will be recompensed for this investment through subsequent research block grant allocations.

Other incidental fees including health cover (for non IPRS holders), travel and associated costs, accommodation and personal expenses are the responsibility of the candidate.

4.4.5 Specific supervisory arrangements including the proportion of time each supervisor will spend with a student should be specified in the student’s individual agreement with the HEPs.

4.4.6 HEPs should specify with students specific processes for the submission of grievances and instances of misconduct between the parties involved.
4.4.7 HEPs must identify either the proportion of the completion that will be counted by each HEP, or an agreed transparent method for calculating this proportion once the student completes their award.

HEPs should determine the proportion of a completion through the attributable effort of each HEP in the research training of the student, toward a successful completion.

Primarily, this should reflect the time enrolled by the student at each HEP. However, HEPs may also negotiate any differing costs reflective of supervisory, infrastructure, project or scholarship costs provided by each HEP. **In all instances, the combined value of any completion in the reported must not exceed one.**

4.4.8 Both HEPs are responsible for negotiating and defining rights to the intellectual property of research undertaken by a joint HDR student throughout their degree. Arrangements for Copyright and intellectual property should be defined within individual student agreements prior to enrolment and HEPs are responsible for ensuring evidence of any agreement reached between the two institutions is retained.

DIISR recommends that IP arrangements between HEPs should be flexible and structured to ensure that the allocation of IP rights appropriately considers the capabilities, contributions and obligations and risks of each HEP and the student in such arrangements.

Both HEPs should consider the balance between the intellectual contributions being made to the project and the resource contributions provided by each HEP and the student. IP arrangements should fairly represent these contributions and provide options ranging from either one or the other HEP primarily owning the IP rights in conjunction with the student.