

Process	Supporting HDR progress
<b>Related Policy:</b>	HDR policy
<b>Objectives</b>	To define the processes in supporting HDR academic progress and monitoring progress at supervision meetings and at candidature milestone reviews.
<b>Exclusions</b>	RMIT students who are not enrolled in a higher degree by research program
<b>Definitions and acronyms</b>	
<p>CASP: Candidate Action and Support Plan</p> <p>Centre: In Higher degrees by research processes this term denotes an academic unit at RMIT Vietnam campus. For further definitions refer to the <i>Higher Degrees by Research Policy</i>.</p>	
<b>Process Steps</b>	
<p><b>Part A - Regular monitoring of candidate progress</b></p> <p><b>1 Requirement for regular supervision meetings</b></p> <p>1.1 Supervisors are required to regularly assess the candidate's overall academic progress and their preparedness for the next candidature milestone review.</p> <p>1.2 Supervisors and candidates will agree on a supervision meeting schedule which will depend on the candidate's study mode and their stage of candidature, but meetings should normally occur at least once a fortnight or part-time equivalent.</p> <p>1.3 At a minimum, meetings between supervisor/s and candidates and the recommendations arising from them must be documented at least once per research quarter for both full-time and part-time candidates who are not on a leave of absence.</p> <p>1.4 Candidates and their supervisors are responsible for keeping a record of supervision meetings on file for reference in order to record tasks the candidate must undertake, and the responsibilities of the supervisor, leading up to the next milestone review.</p> <p><b>2 Methods for maintaining records of progress</b></p> <p>2.1 The means of documenting meeting outcomes should be agreed by the Senior supervisor and candidate.</p> <p>2.2 Electronic records may be kept instead of hardcopy records.</p> <p>2.3 Both the candidate and all supervisors must have access to a copy of the record for their future reference.</p> <p><b>3 Records of supervision meetings</b></p> <p>3.1 The following items should be covered:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Date of the meeting</li> <li>Name of candidate</li> <li>Name(s) of supervisor(s) present:</li> <li>What is the next milestone review expected of the candidate: Confirmation of Candidature; Second milestone review; Third milestone review</li> <li>What were the key matters discussed during this meeting?</li> <li>What critical feedback was provided by the supervisor on the work presented and directions for moving forward?</li> <li>List specific tasks the candidate agreed to do prior to the next meeting</li> <li>List specific tasks the supervisor agreed to do prior to the next meeting</li> <li>Any factors with the potential to impact on the timely and effective achievement of the next milestone</li> <li>Any other matters to be documented</li> <li>A proposed date for the next meeting</li> <li>Acknowledgement by candidate and supervisor/s (electronic is acceptable)</li> </ol> <p><b>4 Candidates who need additional support for their academic progress</b></p> <p>4.1 Candidates seeking additional support may request a meeting with their supervisory team and/or</p>	

HDR Coordinator to discuss their progress and develop a detailed action plan to assist the candidate maintain progress.

- 4.2 All discussions relating to progress, referrals to services and updates to the candidate's research plan must be documented, shared between the candidate and supervisory team and filed on the candidate's e-file.

## **Part B – Candidature milestone review process**

### **5 Convening a review panel**

- 5.1 The HDR Coordinator of the school/centre will convene the Review Panel and must ensure there is no potential or actual conflict of interest between the Review Panel members and/or the candidate.
- 5.2 A Review Panel shall comprise no more than four members:
- a Chair, who will be the School/Centre HDR Coordinator or another Category 1 supervisor from the School/Centre;
  - up to two supervisors, including the Senior or a Joint Senior supervisor;
  - a member who is independent of the supervisory team. This member of the panel must be a registered supervisor (or, if external to the university, have a doctoral qualification or equivalent).

### **6 Scheduling of milestone reviews**

- 6.1 Milestone review presentations are scheduled in accordance with section 15 of the HDR policy.
- 6.2 The milestone review time frame is automatically re-calculated when a candidate takes an approved leave of absence or changes their study load.
- 6.3 The milestone review will be presented to a forum of the relevant research community, for example a School/Centre or college seminar, or Graduate Research Conference and the candidate is expected to take questions from Review Panel members and the wider audience.
- 6.4 Where a candidate is not able to attend a scheduled milestone review due to compassionate or compelling circumstances [hyperlink] they should notify their Senior supervisor and HDR Coordinator as early as possible, and provide documentary support for their request. The HDR Coordinator will organise for the milestone review to be re-scheduled at an appropriate time.

### **7 Closed milestone reviews**

- 7.1. In exceptional circumstances a candidate may request a milestone review presentation to be made solely to a Review Panel rather than in a public forum. Candidates make the request by submitting a case and supporting documentation, including evidence of support from their Senior supervisor, to their HDR Administrator.
- 7.2. The case is considered for endorsement by the Dean/Head of School/Centre (or nominee), after consultation with the supervisory team. If the request is endorsed, the HDR Administrator must submit the documentation for approval by the Dean, SGR.
- 7.3. The request will normally be made on the basis of personal/health reasons or where the research may have IP restrictions placed on it.

### **8 Location**

- 8.1. If a candidate is unable to attend a milestone review due to location, the HDR Coordinator will organise a modified milestone review presentation.
- 8.2. The requirements for the review will be the same (see section 7) but the presentation may involve use of electronic communication.
- 8.3. The HDR Coordinator or their nominee may consult the candidature management team of the SGR to ensure that the proposed modified process is acceptable.
- 8.4. All costs for these presentations will be borne by the enrolling School/Centre.

### **9 Sanctions assessment**

- 9.1. Candidates who are subject to sanctions assessment must have a new sanctions assessment completed by their Senior supervisor if the research topic has changed since admission or the last milestone review (refer to the Assessing HDR applications in compliance with autonomous sanctions considerations process).

### **10 Exemptions from milestone reviews**

- 10.1. Candidates transferring to RMIT from another institution may apply for an exemption for their Confirmation of Candidature review by submitting a request to their Senior supervisor, including evidence from their previous institution of successful completion of a Confirmation of Candidature (or similar milestone) that is equivalent to RMIT's Confirmation of Candidature requirements for their current research project. Support for the exemption from their Senior supervisor is required before the request can be processed.
- 10.2. The case is considered for endorsement by the HDR Coordinator, after consultation with the

supervisory team. If the request is endorsed, the HDR Administrator must submit the documentation for approval by the Dean, SGR.

## 11 Written components of reviews

- 11.1. All candidates must develop a research plan/timeline in the first three months of enrolment. The document includes major tasks and deadlines within candidature and will be modified to reflect changes as they occur. This document is provided at each milestone review.
- 11.2. All review presentations will be accompanied by submission of appropriate written and supporting materials to the Review Panel as specified in Table 1, and be of an appropriate scholarly standard.
- 11.3. Candidates are required to produce work of the appropriate quality and length for each milestone after discussion with their supervisory team and/or HDR Coordinator.

**Table 1**

Milestone requirements	Milestone review		
	Confirmation of candidature	Second milestone review	Third milestone review
A research proposal/summary document which contains: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the thesis/project title</li> <li>- an abstract of the research</li> <li>- an explanation of how the research is situated in the context of the discipline area/community of practice</li> <li>- a current outline/summary of progress against a detailed research plan/ timeline</li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the rationale, objectives and research questions</li> <li>- how the proposed project will be undertaken (methodology)</li> <li>- an initial review of literature and references</li> </ul>	✓ Include in research proposal		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a concise list of key readings and references to the research</li> <li>- any changes to candidature since the last milestone review</li> </ul>		✓ Include in summary document	✓ Include in summary document
Evidence of ethics approval, or evidence of a submission of an ethics application - candidates needing ethics approval will also have to provide evidence of completion of the relevant online module/s covering human ethics, animal ethics, and gene modification.	✓		
Evidence of completion of the compulsory online Research Integrity module and Intellectual Property (IP) module	✓		
Evidence of any planned or completed research outputs, either sole or co-authored	✓	✓	✓
Evidence of being enrolled in, having successfully completed, or been exempted from, the research methods	✓		

course listed in the program guide			
Thesis-based research - a draft of chapters of the thesis, or equivalent in draft or published papers, as deemed appropriate for the discipline		at least two chapters	at least four chapters
Project-based research – a portfolio of work as appropriate to the discipline which includes a draft of the dissertation		draft dissertation required	advanced draft of dissertation required
Any other requirements the School/Centre deems necessary.	✓	✓	✓

## 12 Convening and running a milestone review

- 12.1. The candidate must submit all documentation to the HDR administrator in the School/Centre at least 15 working days before the scheduled date of the milestone.
- 12.2. The Senior supervisor must ensure that the supervisor section of the relevant milestone review form is completed and provided to the HDR administrator at least 15 working days before the scheduled date of the milestone.
- 12.3. Candidates must notify their School/Centre of any specific equipment requirements 10 working days before their presentation. School/Centres are to make available to candidates any necessary equipment for projection of sound/visual or text based presentations.
- 12.4. The HDR administrator must forward the milestone documents to the Review Panel members at least 10 working days before the scheduled date of the presentation.
- 12.5. A Review Panel must check that any necessary human or animal ethics approval, copyright clearances and/or intellectual property arrangements are in place or underway.
- 12.6. The duration of the review presentation will normally be an hour which includes at least 20 minutes for the oral presentation, additional question time and time for the review panel to have discussion on the candidate's work and agree on the main points for the milestone report, and the feedback to the candidate.
- 12.7. Individual disciplines may require longer presentations at some reviews.
- 12.8. Candidates must be provided with informal feedback immediately following their presentation.
- 12.9. The Review Panel must confer in camera, as soon as possible, but no longer than 1 week after the presentation. At this meeting the panel reviews whether the candidate's progress is satisfactory or not satisfactory (refer to section 13) and decides on a recommendation for the outcome of the review (refer to section 14).
- 12.10. The Panel must provide detailed feedback to the candidate, and include recommendations for the candidate and supervisors on any amendments necessary to the submitted documentation or oral presentation.
- 12.11. The Chair of the Review Panel must finalise and endorse the Milestone review form after the meeting. The form is then provided to the HDR Coordinator and HDR administrator.
- 12.12. The completed review form and research proposal (Confirmation of Candidature) or summary document (second or third milestone review) is submitted to the SGR by the HDR Administrator, who also saves a copy of the full written documentation to the candidate's e-file.
- 12.13. The SGR checks the Milestone review form and associated documents for completeness and compliance with the milestone review process and provides the form and the candidate's milestone review documentation to the Dean, SGR or nominee/s for review and approval.
- 12.14. Candidates are formally informed in writing by the SGR of the outcome of all milestone reviews. Those who achieve their milestone are regarded as having satisfactory progress and are allowed to proceed to the next milestone.

## 13 Criteria for the assessment of candidature progress at a milestone review

- 13.1. Panel members reviewing candidates will look for the following assessment criteria:
  - 13.1.1. **Confirmation of Candidature**
    - a) A clear summary explication of the candidate's aims and the significance of the research.
    - b) Evidence that the candidate has begun to adequately reflect on their research framework, and its relationship to the existing body of knowledge.
    - c) Evidence that the candidate understands the proposed methodology and has the skills needed to undertake the research.
    - d) An indication that the research is original and will produce new knowledge (PhD

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Operational Responsibility: School of Graduate Research

Contact: [sgr.candidature@rmit.edu.au](mailto:sgr.candidature@rmit.edu.au)

- candidates) or appropriate to the level of a Masters by research degree.
- e) A clear and viable schema for completing the degree, including a research plan with a specific timeline for the research program from confirmation to completion.

### 13.1.2. **Second** milestone review

- a) Presentation of research outcomes of sufficient quality and quantity to support a coherent and critical account of that work.
- b) Evidence that the candidate has been developing the research and testing their methodology as they progressed.
- c) Evidence that the candidate has a strong understanding of how their research is situated in the existing knowledge of their discipline, and its relationship to work by other researchers.
- d) A clear and viable schema for completing the degree, including a detailed timeline of the research program from the mid-point to completion.

### 13.1.3. **Third** milestone review

- a) Evidence of a coherent account of the candidate's research and the submission of research outcomes which support their aims and answer their research question/s.
- b) Evidence that the candidate has successfully situated their research within the discipline, and taken account of other research related to their topic.
- c) Evidence that the research is original and has produced new knowledge (PhD candidates); or appropriate to the level of a Masters by research degree.
- d) A clear plan and detailed timeline showing how the thesis/project will be completed in the time between the Third milestone review and the submission date.

## 14 Assessment of progress at a milestone review

### 14.1. Milestone review outcomes

#### 14.1.1. There are two possible outcomes for candidates at their milestone reviews:

- a) **Milestone achieved** - this outcome can include the requirement for a candidate to make amendments to the satisfaction of their Senior supervisor, to their milestone documentation;

or

- b) **Milestone not achieved** - this outcome leads to the classification of the candidate as at risk of unsatisfactory academic progress (hereafter referred to as at risk).

14.2. If a candidate is given an outcome of *Milestone not achieved* they are automatically placed at risk by the SGR and advised that they will need to attempt the milestone a second time. An at risk meeting must be organised by the HDR Coordinator within 15 working days of the milestone notification being sent to the candidate. A Candidate Action and Support Plan (CASP) is developed to assist the candidate to regain satisfactory progress. For more details about the CASP process see section 15.

14.3. Where a candidate is required to complete a milestone for the second time due an outcome of *Milestone not achieved*, the milestone must be presented within the time frame specified on the CASP. The process used must be in accordance with section 11, however a Milestone review – review of amendments form [hyperlink] will be completed by the panel instead of a Milestone review form.

## Part C - At risk process

## 15 Identification of unsatisfactory academic progress

15.1 Circumstances under which candidates may be placed *at risk of unsatisfactory academic progress* (hereafter to be referred to as *at risk*) are explained in sections 22 to 24 of the *Higher Degree by Research Policy*.

15.2 If a candidate is identified as being at risk in between milestone reviews, the Senior supervisor must advise the HDR Coordinator of the circumstances in writing.

15.3 The HDR Coordinator will decide whether the candidate meets the conditions for being placed at risk and advise the Senior supervisor of their decision.

15.4 Candidates can be classified as at risk by the Dean, SGR in exceptional circumstances. If a candidate is identified as being at risk by the Dean, SGR, the HDR Coordinator, candidate and supervisors are advised of this classification in writing and the candidate will be invited to attend an at risk meeting.

15.5 For a summary of the at risk process see the at risk process flowchart listed in *Appendix 1*.

15.6 Convening an at risk meeting

15.6.1. At risk meetings can be face-to-face or convened with a candidate at a remote location by using communication technology.

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Contact: [sgr.candidature@rmit.edu.au](mailto:sgr.candidature@rmit.edu.au)

15.6.2. In cases where the candidate is placed at risk they will be notified of the classification in writing by the HDR Coordinator or HDR Administrator and invited to attend an at risk meeting within 15 working days of the date of the notification letter.

15.6.3. At the meeting the attendees will discuss reasons for the lack of academic progress and the support that is available to the candidate to assist them regain their satisfactory progress. A CASP will be developed as part of the outcome of the at risk meeting.

### 15.7 Attendees

15.7.1. The at risk meeting will involve the Senior supervisor and/or the HDR Coordinator (to be decided by the school), and the candidate. The presence of any Associate supervisor/s is at the discretion of the academic convening the meeting.

15.7.2. The candidate may take a support person to the at risk meeting.

### 15.8 Documentation

15.8.1. Meeting minutes must be taken to supplement the information which will be captured in the CASP. These minutes must document:

- reasons provided by the candidate for lack of progress and support which will be offered to them;
- discussion of the at risk process and the implications of not meeting CASP requirements within the time frame specified;
- candidature or enrolment variations that could be considered by the candidate (e.g. change of load or LOA) and how to apply for these;
- any specific communication requirements between the candidate and supervisor/s during the CASP period.

15.8.2. A copy of the minutes must be provided to the supervisory team and candidate and saved to the candidate's e-file.

15.8.3. The date of the at risk meeting must be recorded on the HDR candidature database by the school HDR Administrator.

## 16 A Candidate Action and Support Plan (CASP) must be developed for all candidates placed at risk.

### 16.1. The CASP must include:

16.1.1. documented recommendations by the Senior supervisor and/or HDR Coordinator for additional support for the candidate. This may include, but is not limited to:

- school/centre-based support, such as increased supervisory meetings, regular meetings with the HDR Coordinator and/or supporting an increase in hours per week spent on research;
- variations to candidature, such as reducing study load, applying for LOA, reviewing the supervisory arrangements and/or applying for an extension beyond maximum (refer to the *Program duration process*);
- referrals to other RMIT services, such as wellbeing services and/or academic support services.

16.1.2. an identified end date for the CASP, at which time the HDR Coordinator will review the action plan and the progress made and determine an outcome (refer to 16.3).

16.1.3. an action plan developed by the candidate and Senior supervisor and endorsed by the candidate, their supervisor/s, and the HDR Coordinator. This plan must consist of tasks for the candidate that:

- are clear, detailed and specific – the candidate, supervisory team and HDR Coordinator should have the same understanding of each task after reading the action plan;
- have set deadlines that are achievable within the time frame of the CASP (in the event of any unexpected absence, the action plan should be reviewed and updated to reflect any delays, as appropriate);
- include reasonable time for any specific training or access to facilities that is required.

The action plan may also include tasks and deadlines for the supervisory team, such as providing feedback within set period of time to ensure that the candidate can complete their tasks within the time frame of the CASP.

### 16.2. If a candidate:

- does not attend an at risk meeting, or
- contribute to the development of a CASP, or
- sign the CASP

they are still provided with a copy of the CASP and expected to follow the recommendations and action plan within it by the proposed end date.

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- 16.3. The time frame for a CASP is typically for a period between four weeks and six months, as determined by the HDR Coordinator. It is not recommended that a CASP exceed 6 months.
- 16.3.1. At the end of the nominated CASP period, the HDR Coordinator must review the candidate's progress against sections 4 and 5 of the CASP. If a candidate who is at risk:
- has met the requirements of their CASP their candidature is no longer at risk and they are notified of this outcome, or
  - has not met the requirements of the CASP, and is not able to explain their lack of progress to the satisfaction of the HDR Coordinator, the candidate must be notified that they are being recommended by the HDR Coordinator to a Research Candidate Progress Committee (RCPC) for consideration of a classification of unsatisfactory academic progress.
- 16.3.2. Notifications about the review of CASP period should be sent within 10 working days of the CASP expiry unless there are extenuating circumstances, for example the absence of the HDR Coordinator.

### Part D - The Research Candidate Progress Committee (RCPC)

#### 17 Convening an RCPC

- 17.1. The HDR Coordinator must formally request to the College that an RCPC be convened if the conditions set out in section 16.3.1b are met.
- 17.2. The RCPC will comprise the following members and is convened by the College:
- Committee Chair (College GRC member or nominee)
  - School/Centre HDR Coordinator
  - An independent senior academic from another school in the same College, who is registered as a Category 1 supervisor.
- 17.3. RCPC meetings can be face-to-face or convened with a candidate at a remote location by using communication technology.
- 17.4. Attendees
- 17.4.1. The members of the candidate's supervisory team are invited to the RCPC however they are not members of the RCPC and are not involved in the recommendation of an outcome to the Dean, SGR. At least one supervisor must attend the meeting.
- 17.4.2. Candidates may have one person attend the RCPC to support them.
- 17.5. Candidates must be notified of an RCPC via email, and invited to attend, by the Secretary of the RCPC at least 20 working days prior to the meeting. The RCPC Secretary will be an administrator from the College office.
- 17.6. Written submission
- 17.6.1. Candidates are offered the opportunity to make a written submission to the committee. If they accept their submission should evidence, explain and disclose all relevant issues and special circumstances which have impacted on their academic performance. They must also provide grounds to RMIT that clearly define how they will improve their progress so that it can be assessed as 'satisfactory'. Wherever possible, this written submission must be supported by relevant independent documentation.
- 17.6.2. Any written submission is to be provided by the candidate to the Secretary of the RCPC at least 10 working days prior to the meeting.
- 17.7. In the case of a candidate who does not attend the RCPC, or lodge a written submission, the meeting will be held and the committee will make a recommendation based on the evidence available.

#### 18 RCPC outcomes

- 18.1. After consideration of all available evidence by the Committee, the Chair, RCPC can recommend to the Dean, SGR:
- that there is a valid case for the candidate to be allowed to continue in their program, because there is insufficient evidence of unsatisfactory progress. In this case the candidate remains at risk and the School/Centre develops a new CASP, or
  - that the candidature is terminated due to unsatisfactory academic progress.
- 18.2. The recommendation must be documented on the Research Candidate Progress Committee (RCPC) outcome form.
- 18.2.1. The Secretary of the RCPC takes minutes of the meeting. A copy of the minutes must also be saved to the candidate's e-file.
- 18.2.2. The RCPC outcome form and meeting minutes are provided to the candidate, RCPC members, any supervisors who attended the meeting, and the SGR by the RCPC Secretary within 5 working days of the RCPC meeting. The SGR is also sent a complete

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- 18.2.3. set of the supporting documentation at this time.  
 The notification of the final RCPC outcome from the Dean, SGR, will be provided to the candidate via email within 5 working days of the SGR receiving the recommendation from the RCPC.

## 19 Process for termination

- 19.1. In the case of a recommendation that the candidature is terminated, if the Dean SGR approves the recommendation a complete set of progress documents is reviewed by the ARG for compliance with RMIT policies. The candidate will receive a notification of the outcome via email within 10 working days the ARG receiving the progress documentation from SGR.
- 19.1.1. If, after review, a termination of candidature decision is found to be non-compliant by the ARG the SGR will inform the candidate, School/Centre and College that the candidate will remain at risk. A new CASP must then developed by the School/Centre.
- 19.1.2. If the termination documentation is compliant the ARG will commence the process of cancellation of enrolment.
- 19.1.3. The notification of the intention to cancel enrolment will be provided to the candidate by the ARG.
- 19.1.4. For a summary of the at risk and termination processes see the at risk process and termination process flowcharts in *Appendix 1*.

## Part E – Appeal against termination

### 20 Appeals - eligibility and processes

- 20.1 A candidate may appeal against a decision to terminate their candidature which has been based on their having unsatisfactory academic progress to the University Appeals Committee (UAC) via the Academic Registrar. The appeal process detailed in the Assessment, Academic Progress and Appeals Regulations should be followed.
- 20.2 A candidate may lodge an appeal on the following grounds:
- there is evidence of a breach of University legislation, policy or process in the handling of the at risk process which has had a meaningful impact on the determination to terminate the candidature, and/or
  - there is significant new, relevant evidence that was not available at the time of the Research Candidate Progress Committee (RCPC) meeting.
- 20.3 Candidates must lodge their appeal application no later than 20 working days from the date the notification of intention to cancel their enrolment is sent to them by the university.
- 20.4 A candidate is entitled to maintain their enrolment during an internal appeal against a decision to terminate their HDR candidature due to unsatisfactory academic progress. The process to initiate enrolment cancellation by the Academic Registrar's Group will not be undertaken until the candidate is notified of the outcome of the UAC hearing.
- 20.5 Where an international candidate studying in Australia has their candidature terminated for unsatisfactory academic progress, the Academic Registrar will advise the Director, International Services to report the candidate to the Federal Government.
- 20.6 If candidature is terminated, any further enrolment in a Higher Degree by Research program at RMIT can only be achieved by the person re- applying for admission, in accordance with the *Admission policy*.

### Key words for search engine

Appeal, at risk, candidature, confirmation, HDR, meetings, milestone, progress, RCPC, records, reviews, sanctions, submission, supervision, termination