

GUIDELINES FOR PROSPECTIVE HIGHER DEGREES RESEARCH APPLICANTS FOR COMMENCING 2020

RESEARCH IN THE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE & URBAN DESIGN

An intrinsic part of Melbourne's urban fabric, the School of Architecture and Urban Design is engaged in re-imagining and invigorating the environments that shape and enable civic life. Our research activities mobilise imaginative solutions toward expert testing and implementation, while fostering new modes of professional practice that make affirmative and ethical civic impact possible. The School community is international in reach, including many world-renowned architects and designers amidst passionate and engaged staff, and a highly selective body of talented students. As such, its research and teaching activities are always part of active conversations with relevant professions and public interests, tackling issues that matter.

The research strengths of the School are grounded in deep enquiries into the nature of design practice, which informs more tangible engagements and outcomes that help shape the environment for human and ecosystem well-being. This grounding is built through a vertical design studio model and international leadership in practice research, which offer open and agile approaches to designing and engaging with stakeholders.

Research projects in the School take many forms – from investigatory action grounded in the processes of designing and making, through to philosophically and empirically framed research. We describe these as (i) practice research, and (ii) thesis research.

HIGHER DEGREES RESEARCH PROGRAM

Higher Degrees Research (HDR) activity is central to the intellectual life of the in the School of Architecture and Urban Design. HDR scholars work in close collaboration with their supervisory team, each other and other School colleagues to advance the pursuit of new knowledge and ways of thinking about, planning and designing the built environment.

The School includes the discipline areas of Architecture, Urban Design, Interior Design and Landscape Architecture. Candidates for our research degrees undertake their own research, contributing to and extending these disciplines, developing new fields of knowledge, and addressing specific challenges.

Research degrees in the discipline areas of Architecture and Landscape Architecture are only offered at doctoral (PhD) level. The PhD program is usually completed in three years full-time or six years part-time, and a Masters program usually completed in two years full-time or four years part-time.

Our research degrees are not delivered by coursework. Instead, after a one-semester course in Research Strategies, students plan and conduct a structured research project of their own for the whole of their candidature. Our candidates are supported by at least two supervisors, the Research Strategies course, and importantly, a rich community of researchers sharing their work twice yearly (see Biannual Research Symposium, below).

Our postgraduate students are grouped into three regional cohorts: Australia (Melbourne), Asia (Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam) and Europe (Barcelona, Spain). A candidate enrolls in one of these regional cohorts, but

may be eligible to visit the research symposium of a different cohort to present their research in progress.

The School has pioneered Practice Research – as both a medium and outcome – for scholarly investigations by staff and HDR students. This has been highly successful in establishing our very high national and international reputation for research productivity and quality, and has resulted in the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) highest level rating of 5. Our leadership in Practice Research higher degrees includes an EU funded [ADAPT_r program](#) that has established our innovative PRS model for design education in Europe, and a national government funded [DAP_r program](#) that has deepened this approach with partner Australian Universities.

BIANNUAL PRACTICE RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

The School's Higher Degrees by Research (HDR) program is underpinned by an iterative process of twice yearly Practice Research Symposium (PRS) presentations, review-panel discussions and candidate reflection. These biannual Symposia held in each of three regions – Australia, Europe & Asia – serve as the unique format and process for fostering the critical development and evaluation of HDR candidate research progress, as well as for the examination of completing candidates' research undertaken through practice.

Presenting research-in-progress to a review panel at every PRS is necessary to support the steady progress of research. This process prepares candidates for conveying the knowledge contribution of their research.

Design Practice Research PhDs are examined at these Practice Research Symposia via the unweighted combination of three elements: an exposition of creative work, a dissertation, and a live presentation and discussion with examiners.

Candidates researching via thesis mode benefit from the rich culture of exchange at the symposium, and develop robust capacity to convey and review their work. Their research is examined by two external assessors.

FIELDS OF RESEARCH

Research activities in the School are characterised by both the field of research and the mode of undertaking the research. HDR candidates work with a supervisory team to choose the mode and the field of research most suitable to the research undertaking.

HDR scholars in the School engage with fields of research within existing disciplinary terms - Architecture, Urban Design, Landscape Architecture and Interior Design - as well as drawing from multiple disciplines in cross disciplinary cluster/lab settings and/or in terms of specific questions, issues or problems.

The major areas of research strength in the School are:

Generating Future Practice: Enquiries into the changing nature of design practice, the new and emerging forms it needs to take in approaching contemporary problems, and the way that design practice can contribute beyond its own disciplinary realms.

How do designers work in producing the best possible outcomes? What are the models through which it can stage its multi-faceted engagements? What new forms of practice do we need to develop in tackling the emerging, complex problems that contemporary conditions challenge us with?

Transforming Urban Ecologies and Communities: Investigative projects that explore how design can transform the civic realm through designed and constructed environments, with attention across the architectures, interiors, landscapes and infrastructure constituting civic domains. Across the large urban planning scale, and local, site-specific interventions, research projects explore how to re-imagine, invigorate and achieve affirmative urban futures.

How can existing environments be reimagined to offer sustainable and inclusive urban futures? What are the means and ways of understanding and designing alternative solutions to configuring the urban fabric? How might these alternative configurations benefit a multi-species ecology of inhabitants?

Experimental Fabrication Technologies: Development of new ways of designing and making built forms, using robotics, new materials, and augmented realities.

What potential lies in emerging technologies for imagining, designing and developing new approaches to built forms, new on-site operations, and integrating data/digital constructions with the physical? What are the opportunities and barriers to the wider application of these technologies?

Humanitarian Design: The development of evidence-based practice in shelter, infrastructure and settlement design for communities marginalized by the increasing frequency and severity of conflict, poverty, disasters and climate change.

How can designers collaborate with other development and built environment professionals to contribute to improved well-being and resilience in marginalized and displaced communities? In what ways and under what conditions can the design of homes and settlement infrastructure contribute to wider education, health and livelihood goals such communities?

The School regularly advertises our HDR Program's available places and projects in particular fields of research on our [website](#). Applications from prospective HDR scholars are welcome both within and across these fields of research.

MODES OF RESEARCH

Two primary modes of research are available within the School. These are

- (i) Practice Research, and
- (ii) Thesis Research

1. Practice Research

Practice Research involves three approaches which are often undertaken singularly, but sometimes in combination. These are: reflective industry practice, generative practice, and applied practice. A practice research submission for examination may comprise a short dissertation, artefacts of research, and an experiential presentation; and sometimes is conveyed by a larger dissertation or thesis alone.

Reflective Industry Practice: A Reflective Industry Practice mode of research involves practitioners operating largely in a professional environment, generally with a peer-reviewed and award-winning body of work developed over 10 years or more. These practitioners have already developed recognised mastery in their field. They reflect upon the nature of that mastery within a critical framework that invites reviewing

the nature of their mastery, defining its enabling structures, its knowledge bases, and the implications of the nexus between these for emerging forms of research-led practice. They conclude by speculating through design on the nature of their future practice. They demonstrate their finding publicly, through an exhibit, a presentation to the examiners, and a written dissertation.

Two kinds of knowledge are created by this research. One concerns the ways in which designers marshal their intelligence, to construct the mental space within which they practice design. The other reveals how public behaviours are invented and used to support design practice. This research model extends and develops the knowledge base of their profession, and thus its ability to serve society.

Generative Practice: A Generative Practice mode of research crosses boundaries between professional and academic/university-based research practices, and often between disciplines. This practice research approach enables practitioners to generate new kinds of practices, whether this remains within a discipline, or establishes new fields of practice in response to challenges and concerns emerging in a changing world. Candidates might be early career, seeking to enter into a period of deep enquiry that transforms a set of practice-based interests into a more developed practice with a well-articulated emphasis, set of agendas and approaches. They might equally be mid- or later-career practitioners seeking to generate a new practice trajectory through a transformation of their established mastery. They demonstrate their findings publicly in ways most appropriate to the particularities of their practice research. Most often this occurs through an exhibit, a written dissertation, and a presentation to examiners.

This mode offers new knowledge in the form of previously unarticulated approaches to practice, informed by specific issues and challenges that direct their generative action. These new articulations contribute to both established and emerging communities of practice, and offer new possibilities concerning approaches to the emerging challenges society face. Streams within the generative practice mode pertain to either disciplines or research clusters/laboratories.

Applied Practice: An Applied Practice mode of research pertains to specific research projects and problems, where practitioners generally work toward new ways of enabling creative practices. This often involves working with a larger team through the vehicle of a defined research project, leading to the development of new techniques, technologies and capabilities that will benefit professional practices beyond that specific project vehicle. Candidates are often early career, but may come from all career stages. They generally offer particular kinds of expertise needed within a specific research project, developing that expertise as they establish new ways of enabling creative practices.

This mode enables the practices of others by offering new knowledge of relevance to specific problems, as exemplified through its application to specific research project/s. These contributions can be applied to related situations, opening up new possibilities, questions and capabilities for others, and/or offering new ways to solve particular problems. Streams within the Applied Practice mode pertain to specific projects and/or research clusters/laboratories.

2. Thesis Research

Thesis Research is the traditional mode of enquiry through which philosophical, historical, experimental and field studies are undertaken and is characteristic of much research in the social sciences and cultural studies, and is examined by submission of a thesis alone.

Thesis Research is based upon the critical analysis of a question, issue or problem within or across a field of knowledge and seeks to make new and original contributions to ways in which the topic may be understood. A detailed literature review problematises and analyses what is known about the topic and develops a specific set of research questions, aims, and objectives for the study. A tightly conceived research design is then developed based upon qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods. This research design is implemented and the resulting data analysed and interpreted in the light of existing literature in order to uncover new findings and make recommendations for both future professional practice and research in the field. The research results in a written thesis that is examined by international assessors in relevant fields.

Practice and Thesis Research may be integrated, however. For example, in the context of a community of researchers engaged in Practice Research, Thesis Research may also involve practice-based research approaches, forming a hybrid between practice and traditional forms, and offer practice-led research findings in the context of a more broadly scoped research enquiry. Equally, the thesis model may offer new knowledge about creative practices, or for creative practices.

PREPARATION FOR PROSPECTIVE APPLICANTS

Potential applicants are expected to familiarise themselves with the School research culture. Please visit our [School website](#) to find out more about our School and our research degrees program. An outline of our practice research culture, including videos of past candidates' examinations, is available at the [Practice Research Portal](#).

A limited number of RMIT Fee-Waiver Scholarships and Stipends is available by competitive application for prospective International candidates studying onshore in Australia, and Australian and New Zealand citizens. General information on [postgraduate research at RMIT University](#) such as [scholarships](#), fees and more can be found by following the links starting here.

Further information about fees for our postgraduate research PhD (program DR207) and Master of Design (program MR207) is available for (i) [international candidates studying onshore](#) in Australia, (ii) international candidates studying offshore in our Asia or Europe cohort, and (iii) Australian and New Zealand citizens eligible for a national government [Research Training Program](#) place.

We ask serious prospective practice research applicants to attend a PRS in order to become informed of our research culture, to determine whether it suits you, and to meet prospective supervisors. Further information and dates for the PRS series can be found [here](#).

The School of Architecture & Urban Design does not accept applications to its research programs before an applicant has satisfied pre-application presentation requirements. The pre-application process must be completed before a successful applicant will be invited to lodge a formal application. Please do not apply directly to RMIT's School of Graduate Research, or with RMIT International.

If you are interested to pursue higher degree research in the School of Architecture & Urban Design, please follow these steps.

STEP 1: REVIEW THE SCHOOL'S HDR PROGRAM PLACES AND PROJECT OPPORTUNITIES ADVERTISED ONLINE

Familiarise yourself with the School of Architecture & Urban Design's currently advertised [HDR opportunities](#). We ask you to identify one or more of the HDR place/project opportunities in a field and mode of research that suits your interests. Note the School staff members listed as available to offer primary supervision for specific opportunities.

Prospective applicants with both outstanding experience and a research proposal which does not match an advertised place/project are invited to identify a most suitable School supervisor with shared research interests, and enquire with them about the possibility of the research being supported.

STEP 2. GAIN THE SUPPORT OF A PRIMARY SUPERVISOR AND SUBMIT AN EXPRESSION OF INTEREST (EOI) VIA THE ADMISSIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL AND RESEARCH WEBSITE

A potential applicant must firstly establish the support of a [School staff member](#) listed on an [HDR project/place opportunity outline](#) who is currently offering supervision, interested to be the primary supervisor of your research, and support you to make a pre-application presentation.

In order to convey your interest, please send an email as follows:

(i) Address the email to both the specific staff member advertised as offering primary supervision, and CC the HDR admin team at aud.hdradmin@rmit.edu.au

(ii) If you are interested in applying to our ASIA or EUROPE cohorts, you must also obtain the agreed support of the region's PRS Chair to proceed further.

- For Europe, also CC your email to PRS Europe Chair (acting) Associate Professor Paul Minifie, paul.minifie@rmit.edu.au
- For Asia, also CC your email to PRS Asia Chair (acting): Associate Professor Graham Crist, graham.crist@rmit.edu.au

(iii) Title the email subject heading: 'Higher Degree by Research Enquiry in . . . (the field and mode of research advertised that you want to pursue)'

(iv) Include a short description of your background, your motivation for undertaking postgraduate research, and your suitability to the HDR place/project of your interest,

(v) Formalise your Expression of Interest (EOI) by uploading a CV, a concise folio, transcripts of formal education, a research proposal, evidence of your relevant experience and background that conveying your suitability and other requested documentation (see STEP 3) to the [RMIT University Application Services](#) website.

STEP 3: ATTEND A PRE-APPLICATION PRESENTATION INTERVIEW

The primary supervisor or PRS Chair that is willing to support your application will invite you to make a pre-application presentation to a panel comprising your prospective supervisory team of two supervisors, and chaired by the School's HDR coordinator or PRS Chair.

We schedule pre-application interviews for practice research applicants to coincide with our Practice Research Symposia (PRS) dates in each region so as to assist you in attending, and gaining an appreciation of the research culture of the School. While face-to-face presentations are preferred, video-conference presentations are possible where required, and are offered to thesis mode research applicants. Potential applicants should prepare a pre-application presentation under the guidance of the supervisor supporting your application.

Following advice from the potential primary supervisor, the following must be supplied via the [RMIT University Application Services](#) website, which along with the interview, provides the basis on which the School may offer you a place.

Please note that a proposed research direction is an important part of the selection process, but that approval of the proposal and an offer to enrol does not mean that the proposal is fixed. As the research evolves it is expected that the research proposal will change in response. Within twelve months of enrolling, all candidates undergo a Confirmation of Candidature where the revised and expanded research proposal is reviewed by the School, and upon acceptance, the candidate's enrolment is formally approved.

PRACTICE RESEARCH APPLICANTS

1. A 1-5 page research proposal response to the HDR place/project opportunity

The supervisor supporting your application can provide specific advice on how to convey your background and research interests as relevant to the field and mode of your proposed research. This can be expected to include:

- Proposed title of study, indicating the central theme you are exploring in one succinct phrase.
- How do you intend to respond to the advertised HDR place / project opportunity, and what approach, capabilities and interests will you bring to this research?
- How will you conduct your research, in relation to the School's support for research through reflective industry practice, generative practice, and applied practice?
- A preliminary list of readings, references and precedents, that indicate existing work relevant to your research.

2. A design portfolio or practice website

Please provide a portfolio of past and current work supplied in electronic/digital format as a PDF document or one specific relevant URL link. The folio will usually include:

- A minimum of 4 recent projects, including your undergraduate / Masters work if relevant.
- A short text explanation for each project.
- Notes clarifying your involvement, authorship or role in presented projects.
- A sample of publications about your work, if any, and of your own writing about your work.

3. A critical reflection

- Approximately 1000 words of your own written reflections on an existing practice-based project of your own, with 5-7 relevant images, drawings or other visual material.

4. A Curriculum Vitae (CV)

Include education, professional experience, industry affiliation and/or partnerships, creative works, exhibitions, projects and publications, etc, with full reference details. Please also provide contact details of a referee that we may contact.

5. Transcript of academic results

Provide full transcripts of your past academic results, including awarding university program evidence of the percentage that the research component plays in the Honours or Masters level higher degree.

International applicants should also provide their [English language proficiency test result](#).

THESIS RESEARCH APPLICANTS

1. A 1-5 page research proposal response to the HDR place/project opportunity

The supervisor supporting your application can provide specific advice on how to convey your background and research interests as relevant to the field and mode of your proposed research. This can be expected to include:

- Proposed title of study, indicating the central theme you are exploring in one succinct phrase.
- How do you intend to respond to the advertised HDR place / project opportunity, and what approach, capabilities and interests will you bring to this research?
- How will you conduct your research, and methodologies you seek to employ and explore.
- A preliminary list of readings and references that indicate existing work relevant to your research.

2. A portfolio of experience

Please provide a portfolio of past and current work experience supplied in electronic/digital format as a PDF document or one specific relevant URL link. The folio will usually include:

- An outline of your undergraduate / Masters work if relevant.
- An outline of past work and/or research roles, responsibilities and achievements.
- Samples or links to your publications.
- A 1000-3000 word sample of your academic writing.

3. A Curriculum Vitae (CV)

Include education, professional experience, industry affiliation and/or partnerships, publications, conference paper presentations, grants awarded, creative works, exhibitions, projects, etc, with full reference details. Please also provide contact details of a referee that we may contact.

4. Transcript of academic results

Provide full transcripts of your past academic results, including awarding university program evidence of the percentage that the research component plays in the Honours or Masters level higher degree.

International applicants should also provide their [English language proficiency test result](#).

PRESENTATION & INTERVIEW

You are invited to make a 10-minute presentation addressing the following questions:

1. What is your research and/or practice history, and what motivates pursuing the proposed PhD research?
2. How do you intend to respond to the advertised HDR place / project opportunity, and what approach, capabilities and interests will you bring to this research?
3. How and why is the program at RMIT's School of Architecture & Urban Design an appropriate context for your research?

Your presentation is followed by 10-15 minutes of discussion with a panel comprising:

1. The proposed primary supervisor
2. Potential associate supervisor/s or other registered supervisor.
3. Chaired by the HDR Coordinator, regional PRS Chair, or Deputy Dean Research & Innovation, or equivalent.

Each pre-application presentation is followed by internal deliberations in the School. This can be a lengthy process, as the School PRS/HDR Executive considers the strategic alignment of the research and candidate with the School's and RMIT's research priorities. This means candidates should be prepared for a waiting period. Potential applicants will be informed of the panel's decision via email on whether the School of Architecture & Urban Design will invite a formal application to the program.

STEP 4. SUBMIT A FORMAL APPLICATION FOR A HDR CANDIDATE PLACE

If your pre-application interview is successful and your online EOI has been assessed and approved, you will be invited to submit a formal application, which will be a continuation of your EOI submitted via the [RMIT University Application Services](#) website.

To formally apply, you will need to closely read the information emailed to you about how to apply, and apply according to your residency type and location of study. Your application will include the previously provided copy of your brief Research Proposal, a folio and a CV, (as outlined above) as well as other material indicated on the form such as academic transcripts. Applications without Research Proposals will not be considered. Please note that all International applicants must meet RMIT University's [Minimum English Language Requirements](#) for research programs.

Once your application has been logged by the [RMIT University Application Services](#) website it will be forwarded to the School for a final decision on whether you will be offered a place.

STEP 5. COMMENCING CANDIDATURE

Once offered a place, a candidate formally enrolls and commences the first stage of the PhD involving two critical activities:

1. The candidate develops the framework for their research under the guidance of supervisors toward a Confirmation of Candidature presentation, which is the first Milestone Review that formally approves the research to proceed.

2. Undertaking the coursework component of the PhD, usually a [Creative Practice Research Strategies](#) for practice researchers, or a social science oriented Research Strategies course for thesis researchers, with both online and face-to-face activities. The face-to-face component may be undertaken over a semester on campus, or via an intensive 1 or 2 day seminar usually scheduled immediately prior to a PRS. Confirmation of Candidature won't be granted until requirements of the course are complete.

TIMELINE FOR APPLICATIONS 2020

We encourage applicants to undertake their pre-application Interview during a PRS event so that applicants can familiarise themselves with how the PRS program is undertaken and administered. Where this is not possible we will schedule pre-application Interviews outside of the PRS. Interviews with international applicants may be held via video-conference, usually in May and September each year.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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Higher Degrees by Research (HDR) Administration Team
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Australia
Ph: +61 (0)3 9925 6339

[Practice Research Portal](#)

PRS Practice Research Symposium Dates Semester 2, 2019
AU Melbourne: 23-27 October
ASIA Ho Chi Minh City: 19-22 September
EU Barcelona: 21-24 November

LINKS: the digital form of this document includes important hyperlinks. You can find this document online and access links at:

<https://www.rmit.edu.au/about/schools-colleges/architecture-and-urban-design/research>