ieaa

International Education
Association of Australia

ENHANCING THE
EXPERIENCE &
OUTCOMES OF
INTERNATIONAL
HDR CANDIDATES

a guide for **supervisors**

Associate Professor Ly Thi Tran,
Dr Wendy Green & LiLy Nguyen

Australian universities host more than 20,000 international higher degree research (HDR) candidates, which constitute around 32 percent of the total HDR cohort[1]. This presents both a potential for transnational research development and a challenge for the supervision of international HDR candidates.

Further, with the increasing mobility of the academic workforce, it is not difficult to find intercultural supervisory teams. For example, a native English-speaking Australian academic and an academic originally from China co-supervising an international HDR candidate from Indonesia. Not only the HDR cohort but also the supervisory team have become increasingly diverse and intercultural.

This cultural diversity requires new thinking about HDR supervision. International HDR candidates can make original contributions to knowledge and the advancement of research in their host universities as well as to the development of cultural awareness and transnational networks. However, many of these potential contributions often remain unrecognised and both international candidates and supervisors continue to report substantial challenges in successfully negotiating intercultural supervisory relationships and maximising the potential benefits of intercultural supervision.

This good practice guide focuses on one of the key stakeholders in international HDR supervision: the supervisory team. It outlines seven good practice principles (GPP) for supervisors working with international HDR candidates. However, many of the GPPs will be relevant to any supervisory relationship, regardless of the cultural backgrounds of supervisor and candidate.

This guide is supported by a research digest focusing on reciprocal intercultural supervision of international higher degree research (HDR) candidates. The digest, along with additional guides for international candidates and research training managers, are available online at **ieaa.org.au/hdr**

All three guides specifically address the Australian higher education context, and are designed to complement the guidelines and review published by the Australian Council of Graduate Research[2] and the Australian Council of Learned Academies[3].

1   DET (2017), uCube: Higher Education Statistics, http://highereducationstatistics.education.gov.au.
2   Australian Council of Graduate Research (2016), Australian Graduate Research Good Practice Principles, Retrieved from www.ddogs.edu.au/guidelines.
3   McGagh, J, Marsh, H, Western, M, Thomas, P, Hastings, A, Mihailova, M, Wenham, M. (2016), Review of Australia's Research Training System, Report for the Australian Council of Learned Academies, Retrieved from www.acola.org.au.

1

Recognise that the supervision of international HDR candidates is situated in a transnational space.

- Recognise that reciprocal intercultural supervision is embedded within the dynamic, evolving and multi-directional transnational flow of ideas, knowledge, practice, intellectual values and social and professional networks.
- Assist your international candidates to interpret and negotiate the logic and meaning of their research education in their host environment, including the professional and social spaces which they inhabit and how this links with their future aspirations.
- Build a transnational and intercultural relationship with your international HDR candidates based on mutual respect, mutual understanding and inclusive empathy.
- Be prepared to take creative and flexible approaches to supervision and understand that intercultural supervision can take diverse forms.
- Be aware of the crucial support for intercultural supervision required of, and given by, the institution.

2

Recognise and respond to the possible challenges in supervising international HDR candidates.

- Understand that there may be cultural differences between yourself and your international HDR candidates regarding supervisory relationships. Discuss the expectations of roles and responsibilities of both parties.
- Understand that this relationship is mediated in relation to multiple stakeholders in the candidate's education. This includes the research training/education office, faculty and school leadership and management, language and learning advisers, cultural diversity and equity advisers, counselling, accommodation and welfare services, librarians and student associations in the host country, as well as sponsors and employers in the candidate's home country.
- Look out for and be prepared to address cultural and personal differences in ways of learning and communicating. For example, in academic writing conventions, displaying critical thinking, conveying respect for authority, as well as communicating and responding to feedback.
- Look out for signs of (and be prepared to support) candidates experiencing isolation and separation from familial support, understanding that there may be cultural differences in dealing with personal matters.
- Appreciate and be prepared to discuss the influence of cultural, educational, professional and personal backgrounds on research approaches and skills development.

- Develop approaches to supporting candidates to navigate conceptual tensions and multiple cultural, professional and personal adjustments. For example:
  - conducting field research in their home country using new research approaches acquired in the Australian host institution;
  - researching a 'home' problem but using a 'foreign' method;
  - writing their thesis so that it meets the expectations of international examiners, sponsors and current or potential employers in their home country.
- Understand the challenges inherent for international HDRs to not only learn new research approaches and skills but also 'unlearn' their old ones, where relevant.
- Allow for the fact that personal and social life is inseparable from academic life. Understand that international HDR candidates may experience more challenges in organising their personal lives in the host country (for example, finding accommodation, organising childcare and school for their children, health insurance, financial hardship, transport and counselling).
- Be prepared to learn the preferred pronunciation of your candidates' names.
- Look out for and be prepared to access the institution's mediation and complaint processes in a culturally sensitive manner, and encourage candidates to do the same, when either party has concerns about the candidature, supervisory relationship or issues relating to research training management.

Be prepared to take creative and flexible approaches to supervision and understand that intercultural supervision can take diverse forms.

3

Assist international HDR candidates to develop connectedness and a sense of belonging to the research community and the host society.

- Make both academic and social connectedness a priority, recognising it is essential to international HDR candidates' well-being and success.

- Provide your candidates with opportunities to develop connections with other HDR peers and colleagues at your institution, research groups, research centres, department/faculty, institutional communities and student associations.

- Discuss and model the strategies and approaches to establishing and maintaining international HDR candidates' connections with their broader research communities, including researchers and other candidates working in related fields nationally and internationally.

- Encourage international HDR candidates to establish and maintain connections with academics in both home and host countries to enhance knowledge about research and relevant teaching and learning practices.

- Guide international HDR candidates in learning from, and sharing their research through various professional online and offline channels such as ResearchGate, Academia, Twitter, Special Interest Groups and other networks in their disciplines.

- Guide and encourage international HDR candidates to access and participate in relevant conferences, seminars and forums (especially conferences offering prizes/awards/travel grants), research digests, professional blogs and websites relevant to thesis writing (e.g. www.thesiswhisperer.com, www.doctoralwriting.wordpress.com) and thesis databases (e.g. www.trove.nla.gov.au/general/theses).

- Understand that while completing their research, international HDR candidates may have to take into account their sponsor and employers back home, relationships with the diaspora community in the host country as well as how these are connected to their future professional pathways.

- Encourage international HDR candidates to establish connections between home and host institutions/networks for future research and teaching collaboration.

- Foster the academic and social interaction between international and domestic HDRs and encourage peer support among candidates. For example, proofreading of each other's confirmation proposals and providing peer feedback on confirmation/colloquium rehearsals.

- Assist international HDR candidates in recognising the importance of peer feedback through conference and seminar presentations, and of peer review on publications in enhancing their research education and research capacity.

- Encourage international HDR candidates to participate in events and activities in the institutional community as well as the broader host community.

4

Understand the enactment and transformation of identity and agency in transnational spaces for international HDR candidates.

- Recognise that undertaking HDR studies in a foreign country may involve the redefinition of both one's personal and professional self.
- Understand and address the possible confusion and disorientation associated with a change or loss of identity international HDR candidates may face (e.g. from being 'somebody' to being 'nobody', from being a senior lecturer or head of department in their home institution to becoming a student in the host institution).
- Understand and address the potential for international HDR candidates to make the personal, cultural and professional adjustments required by their shift of identity. Understand that their decisions underpinning these multiple adjustments are crucial to enable international candidates to make an informed choice about HDR training[4].
- Assist international HDR candidates to build upon their transnational experience and knowledge and forge their transnational professional identity.
- Acknowledge candidates' intellectual and professional histories and support them to build promising futures as independent scholars, particularly in regard to writing for publication and grant writing, as well as networking opportunities[5].

5

View international HDR candidates' different approaches to learning, academic writing, constructing knowledge and undertaking research as valuable resources.

- Avoid assuming that international candidates are solely responsible for adapting or adjusting to the host country. Take an active role in, and share responsibility for, candidates to be successful in their new academic environment.
- Recognise international HDR candidates' diversity, in terms of expectations, prior learning experiences, proficiency in languages, transnational family commitments, connections to home and the diaspora community, interests and motivations.
- Conduct open and explicit discussions with international HDR candidates about the roles and responsibilities of candidates and supervisors early on in the candidature.
- Conduct open discussions with international HDR candidates about different approaches to academic writing, learning and constructing knowledge.
- Acknowledge and value international HDR candidates' home places and home traditions in their approaches to knowledge construction, learning and research.

---

4   McGagh, J, Marsh, H, Western, M, Thomas, P, Hastings, A, Mihailova, M, Wenham, M. (2016), *Review of Australia's Research Training System*, Report for the Australian Council of Learned Academies. Retrieved from www.acola.org.au.
5   Manathunga, C. (2015), Intercultural doctoral supervision: The centrality of place, time and other forms of knowledge. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 1474022215580119.

6

Foster a commitment to reciprocal intercultural supervision as a venue for transformative learning for all candidates, supervisors, disciplines and the university.

- Be open to learning from HDR candidates in intercultural supervision.
- Foster mutual understanding, respect, sensitivity and reciprocal learning in intercultural supervision.
- Recognise that the encounter of differences in knowledge, skills, linguistic capacities, values and relationships in international HDR supervision are resources for the generation of new knowledge, skills, understandings and connections.
- Recognise the potential benefit of transnational intellectual capital to candidates themselves, to supervisors and to the process of knowledge formation in the discipline.
- Encourage international HDR candidates to compare and contrast familiar approaches to learning and constructing knowledge with the conventions in the host country.
- Enable candidates to use their bilingual/multilingual repertoire to identify knowledge from their own countries[6].
- Encourage international HDRs to engage critically and creatively with new knowledge encountered in the host environment and their own cultural knowledge.

7

Collaborate with other services within the university to provide effective and suitable support for international HDR candidates at different stages of their candidature.

- Develop a coordinated approach in collaboration with the Language and Learning (LAL) Support Unit, HDR Coordinator, Research Training Office, Student Support Services and the library to providing support for candidates early on and throughout the candidature.
- Discuss with international candidates the possible cultural issues that may be associated with the use of LAL support services, such as a sense of losing face[7].
- Encourage international HDRs to make the most of LAL support services that provide targeted support for international HDR candidates, rather than seeing these as remedial services.
- Collaborate with the LAL Support Unit and library and build on their expertise for enhancing the research capacity and optimising the research outcomes of international HDR candidates.
- Seek advice from the LAL advisers, cultural diversity advisers and international candidates themselves on culturally sensitive approaches to communicating and providing feedback to international HDR candidates.
- Develop an understanding of the range of services to which candidates can be referred for assistance (e.g. research capacity building, editing and proofreading, psychological counselling, private tutoring, career development events and alumni).

---

6   Singh, M. (2009), Using Chinese knowledge in internationalising research education: Jacques Rancière, an ignorant supervisor and doctoral students from China, *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 7(2), 185–201

7   Tran, L. T. (2013), *Teaching international students in vocational education and training: New pedagogical approaches*, Camberwell: ACER Press.

Contact us

PO Box 12917
A'Beckett Street
Melbourne VIC 8006
Australia

+613 9925 4579
admin@ieaa.org.au

ieaa.org.au/hdr