Advice to People Contemplating Applying for a Higher Degree by Research

Thank you for your interest in our Higher Degree by Research (HDR) programs. The School of Physiotherapy offers these programs through research and thesis/publications, with students working independently under the guidance of an appointed supervisor. This advice sheet is to help you through the early process of deciding whether to apply to study for a HDR with us.

Past students report that completing a Doctor of Philosophy or Master of Science degree is one of the most rewarding activities of their life. It provides an intense and stimulating intellectual challenge. At the end of your studies you will have a deep understanding of your specialty area and may well be an international leader in the area. However this level of competence and the confidence associated with it only come after the investment of considerable effort.

Therefore, we suggest you carefully consider whether you have what it takes.

There are 3 basic questions you need to ask yourself, and answer to your own satisfaction, prior to formal application:

Am I ready, willing and able?
What issue do I wish to study?
What will the School of Physiotherapy need to provide to support me?

Am I ready, willing and able?

Do I meet the University entry requirements?

- Excellent academic record
  - For PhD – minimum of four years in a tertiary institution with excellent results - Masters degree or First Class or Upper Second Honours degree or Bachelors degree plus Postgraduate Diploma with course weighted average not less than 70% from Curtin or equivalent
  - For MSc – First Class or Upper Second Honours degree or Postgraduate Diploma or Bachelors degree with superior performance plus relevant and substantial work experience from Curtin or equivalent
- High level of English proficiency
- Able to study in Perth for at least some of the time

Do I meet the School of Physiotherapy entry requirements?

- Physiotherapy degree NOT required
- Area of research matches an area of expertise/available facilities within the School

Can I allocate sufficient personal resources?

- Time (for a PhD – 3 years full time or 6 years half time; for a MSc – 2 years full time or 4 years half time)
- Finances for living (HDRs require a long period of concentrated intellectual effort.) Whilst a little part time work is common for full time students, it needs to leave 40 hours a week of clear study time. You are encouraged to find financial support from a scholarship – see Scholarship information at http://www.scholarships.curtin.edu.au/.
- Finances for tuition fees
  - International students all pay fees – the International Office can provide details at http://international.curtin.edu.au/.
Australian students may be able to gain a Research Training Scheme place requiring no fees (effectively a scholarship worth around $30,000), else pay fees of around $10,000pa – Director of HDR can provide details.

- Finances for study costs (The School of Physiotherapy provides some funds to support each project, but funds for large costs will need to be found separately– discuss with your potential supervisor.)

**Do I have sufficient personal skills and capacity?**

- Can I maintain a high level of motivation over a long period?
- Can I work independently?
- Can I manage my own workload timetable?
- Do I have good organizational ability?
- Can I think creatively and develop novel concepts?
- Do I have the intellectual capacity? (Your prior tertiary studies should tell you this.)
- Do I have sufficient basic research skills?
  - Can I find and evaluate published evidence?
  - Can I write well?
  - Do I understand the basic principles of qualitative and quantitative research?

**What issue do I wish to study?**

With your formal Application you will need to provide a 2 page description of the research you intend to conduct. We suggest you allow yourself a reasonable amount of time to develop your ideas in collaboration with your potential supervisor, prior to formal Application. The process which has worked well for prior students is to:

- Read and evaluate a reasonable sample of the available literature
- Contact your potential supervisor to arrange a meeting to discuss your initial ideas. Look at the School Research web page for a potential supervisor or contact the Director of HDR.
- Prepare a 2 page outline of your ideas. The Outline of Proposed Research should include:
  - A working title
  - Aims and potential significance of the research
  - Some general research questions
  - Brief research plan
  - 2 key references
- Discuss your developing ideas on several occasions with your potential supervisor and ask them for several other people to discuss your early ideas with.
What will the School of Physiotherapy need to provide to support me?

Supervision
- Skilled in similar research
- Experienced in supervision
- Knowledgeable in my area of interest
- Personally compatible with me
- (These may be spread over your supervisory team – you may not find them all in one person! Discuss the interim supervisory team with your potential supervisor.)
- Discussion of supervisory issues may be based on the concept of a supervisor-student “letter of agreement”

General research support
- Library access
- Study space
- Computing facilities
- Professional development opportunities (seminars on research skills, opportunities to give presentations etc.)
- Basic consumables budget (photocopying, telecommunications, etc.)

Specific project support
- Specific equipment needed for project
- Project consumables (electrodes, storage media, etc.)

After you have adequately considered the investment you must make and the desirable achievement of a HDR, ask yourself the defining question:

Am I able to make a very strong commitment to achieving the goal of a HDR?

If you are, then proceed with a formal Application.
To assist your preparation of your application, read Guidelines for Doctoral/Masters Students (website http://research.curtin.edu.au/graduate/hdrguidelines/contents.html)

Formal Application for Admission to a Higher Degree

You will need to
- Complete an Application for Admission to a Higher Degree by Research form (available from website http://research.curtin.edu.au/graduate/forms.html#admission)
- This requires the additional information:
  - Curriculum Vitae
  - Nomination and contact details for 2 referees
  - Certified copies of academic transcripts
  - English proficiency test scores where appropriate
  - 2 page research proposal
  - Proof of Australian citizenship or certified copies of Visa and passport

Your potential supervisor will assist you to compete the application forms and check them with you.
- Send two blank referee forms to one academic and one professional referee with instructions to send reference directly to School of Physiotherapy
- Your supervisor will complete the Research Codes

Submit your application directly to the Director of HDR, School of Physiotherapy. Keep a copy for your records.
What happens to my application?
- The Director of HDR will check your application of completeness
- The School Graduate Studies Committee (SGSC) will evaluate your application
- Clarification of some aspects may be sought from you or your potential supervisor(s).
- If the SGSC approves your application it will be forwarded to the Divisional Graduate Studies Committee (DGSC) for evaluation
- The DGSC meets monthly
- If the DGSC approves your application you will be sent a letter of offer and asked to complete and return Enrolment forms
- On return of your enrolment forms you will be enrolled and sent a confirmation of enrolment – you are then officially admitted
Notes for Supervisors:

Preliminary Contacts
- Try to ascertain potential applicant’s intellectual capacity, research knowledge, writing ability, motivation
- Ascertain whether School has necessary supervisory expertise or can build a team with external associate/co supervisors
- Ascertain whether the School has the necessary equipment/resources
- Ascertain whether the project described in developed outline of proposed research is likely to be feasible and make a significant and novel contribution

Formal Application
- Advise student on timing of application – allow 3 weeks for SGSC prior to DGSC agenda close (DGSC approval commonly given outside of meeting schedule on recommendation by school)
- Check Application details.
- Add DEST research codes
- Gain agreement from interim thesis committee
  - (external associate or co-supervisors must have completed 2 forms)
- Respond promptly to queries by SGSC
- Be available to respond to queries by DGSC

Notes for HDR Secretary:

Preliminary Contacts
- Provide potential student with copy of Advice
- Advise potential student of potentially suitable supervisors
- Advise student on timing of application – allow 3 weeks for SGSC prior to DGSC agenda close
- Provide student with e copy of application

Formal Application
- Prepare SGSC application review document
- Check application is complete
- Ask DoHDR for 2 reviewers
- Send application to first reviewer – give 3 days then chase
- Send application to second reviewer – give 3 days then chase
- Give application and reviewer responses to DoHDR – give 3 days then chase for agenda