

2023 Guidelines for Assessing HDR Scholarship Applicants

1. Introduction

Each Faculty/Institute should only award scholarships to applicants that truly meet their **strategic priorities**. A **thorough argument** to support their recommendations must be put forward via the Recommendation for Candidature form.

2. Scoring framework

The following scoring framework forms the basis for assessment of scholarship applications. The scoring framework is based on a 100 point scale and is provided as a guide which could form the basis for a faculty/institute's assessment of scholarship applications. Discretion should be used by each Faculty/Institute to determine a ranking that truly reflects the overall merit of the applicant. Examples of the scoring are provided in [Attachment A](#).

Scoring framework - International and domestic qualifications	Max Points
Academic merit	40
Research experience and publications relative to opportunity	20
Alignment with strategic research priorities	30
Supervisor experience/support	10
TOTAL	100

2.1 Academic merit

The primary academic merit criterion is the honours standard achieved. Applicants must be ranked only if they have either:

- (1) qualified for an honours degree with a first class result (H1 actual); or
- (2) qualifications that are demonstrably equivalent to a bachelors degree with first class honours (H1 equivalent). This is discussed in the section below.

In the absence of an actual first class honours degree, there must be independent and verifiable evidence of equivalence to first class honours. The Faculty/Institute must present a case through the scholarship ranking to support the claim for equivalence to first class honours. Qualifications for which it may be possible to make a case for equivalence to first class honours include:

- masters degrees by research;
- coursework masters degrees with a substantial research component;
- graduate diplomas with honours.

Other pathways may be assessed for equivalency including significant publication or professional research experience. Please see the [Entry pathways to research degrees](#) page for further information.

The factors which may be considered in determining H1 status, as well as the score, are:

- Has the applicant completed a first class honours degree or equivalent qualification?
- What grades has the applicant achieved (e.g. percentage grade or GPA)?
- Did the qualification include a thesis based on original research and how substantial was the document? (e.g. 20,000 words completed over one semester).
- The proportion of the degree that was thesis or original research (e.g. 12/40 credit points).
- Quality of thesis examination reports.

- Applicant's rank within class.
- Academic awards, prizes, scholarships or special recognitions.
- Strength of the two academic referee reports. Only reports on the Deakin referee report template will be considered. If the information provided is not adequate, Faculties/Institutes are encouraged to contact the nominated referees directly prior to returning ranking sheets to Deakin Research.
- Research-related coursework undertaken (e.g. research methods or research statistics units etc.).
- Any special considerations.

Some areas do not offer an honours program and have developed a structured approach to entry to the PhD program via masters by coursework, which has been accepted by the Research and Research Training Committee. The following examples are accepted as honours equivalent for students who have completed a masters by coursework:

- H1 A High Distinction for the main research project plus
a Distinction in four coursework credit points (which must include research methodology), or
a High Distinction for a four credit point research paper.
- H2A A Distinction for the main research paper plus
a Distinction in three coursework credit points (which must include research methodology), or
a Distinction for a four credit point research paper.
- H2B A Credit for the main research paper plus
a Credit in four coursework credit points (which must include research methodology), or
a Credit for a four credit point research paper.

In the case of applicants who do not hold a first class honours degree, but who have commenced higher degree by research candidature, satisfactory candidature progress does not constitute evidence of first class honours equivalence. Current candidates applying for a scholarship must demonstrate that they have added merit to their original candidature application since commencing studies. This can be demonstrated through completion of refereed publications and conference presentations, achievement of relevant awards or prizes and relevant research experience gained in addition to basic candidature requirements for their project.

The maximum score is 40 for an applicant with international or domestic qualifications. This score may need to be adjusted if the applicant has not had an opportunity to gain research experience (see section 2.2 below).

The scoring scheme for applicants with domestic qualifications who have an actual Honours degree is as follows:

High H1	maximum 35 (+ up to 5 for undergraduate record)
Mid H1	maximum 25 (+ up to 5 for undergraduate record)
Low H1	maximum 15 (+ up to 5 for undergraduate record)
H2A	maximum 5 (+ up to 5 for undergraduate record)

Each School's classification of high, mid and low range first class honours differs from year to year and this should be taken into account in the ranking. Additional points can be gained under section 2.2 below for research experience and output where relevant.

2.2 Research experience and publications relative to opportunity

Research experience and publications must be scored relative to the opportunity available to an applicant. The maximum score for this category is 20.

We recognise that an applicant who has recently completed their studies may have had limited or no opportunity to gain experience or produce publications. In these cases a zero weighting should be given to this section and a multiplier of up to 1.5 times should be applied to the academic merit score.

This multiplier can be used to determine an initial ranking and discretion used thereafter in adjusting the score to ensure it is applied equitably.

Factors which may be taken into account in assessing an applicant under this category include:

- Research experience (e.g. laboratory experience, special research projects undertaken within a professional research environment, previous research grants, extent of applicant's contribution).
- Research outputs (number of quality research publications, particularly those that relate to the proposed research topic), e.g. refereed journal articles, conference presentations, creative works. If the evidence includes publications with several authors, the contribution of the applicant must be identified clearly. Where possible, impact factors of refereed publications should also be provided.
- Professional research experience (context of experience, length of time, seniority, how it relates to the proposed research topic).

2.3 Alignment with strategic research priorities

Faculties are asked to indicate whether the proposed research project aligns with the research direction of one of the following:

- University Strategic Research Centre or Research Institute.
- School/emerging research cluster.

Factors to be taken into account include:

- Is the project part of core SRC or Research Institute activities?
- Does it build on existing research?
- Does it provide support to external or internal grants?
- Does the research project involve a partnership with another university or research organisation?

Up to 30 points can be awarded in this category.

2.4 Supervisor experience/support

The quality of the nominated supervisor or supervisory team must be assessed. The factors to be considered include:

- Track record in terms of HDR completions within a timely manner
- Progress of current HDR candidates
- Extent to which past or current HDR candidates have published
- Extent to which supervisor(s) has published or is actively researching in the area of the proposed project
- Relevance of the match between the supervisor and proposed project
- Extent to which supervisors have attracted external or internal research funding
- Early Career Researchers (ECRs) who are nominated as principal supervisors should be teamed with a supervision panel of more senior academics.

For supervisors who have previously supervised a candidate to completion, a limit of 7 EFSTL applies. A supervision limit of 3 EFSTL applies to supervisors who have recently completed the fast-track supervision training and are yet to supervise a candidate to completion.

A maximum of 10 points can be awarded in this category.

ATTACHMENT A

Scholarship ranking: Examples of scoring and cases for H1 ranking

The following are fictional examples of the types of cases that may be made by a Faculty/Institute for an applicant for a scholarship.

The examples have been written with specific scenarios in mind, i.e. various combinations of the applicant's academic merit, research experience, strategic alignment and supervisor experience. It is recommended that they be read together because the type of argument made for an aspect of one case may be appropriate in another situation.

Applicant A – International applicant with international four-year bachelors and Australian coursework masters with a minor thesis <i>(Background summary: case for high H1 equivalence; excellent strategic alignment with an SRC; highly experienced supervisor)</i>	
Comments by Faculty	Score
<p>Academic merit</p> <p>The applicant completed a BCom degree at [insert name of overseas institution] which is assessed as equivalent to an Australian bachelor's degree. He graduated as the best student of the final year. This degree had a core thesis component which comprised the fourth year. The thesis was graded Excellent and according to the first referee, was approximately 25,000 words. He commenced a Master of Strategic Management at [insert name of Australian University] in 2008 and this will be completed within the next two months. His results in the coursework to date average 86%. The final semester requires completion of a thesis (approximately 15,000 words) and the second referee predicts a good HD grade, most likely in the 85-90% range. The applicant is also a current recipient of a Faculty of Management Dean's Scholarship to the value of \$10,000. This is a highly competitive scholarship based on previous academic merit.</p>	60 (base score of 40 X 1.5 ¹ weighting because no opportunity for research experience or publications)
<p>Research experience and publications relative to opportunity</p> <p>The applicant has not yet completed his PhD-qualifying course so has had no opportunity.</p>	0
<p>Strategic alignment</p> <p>The proposed topic has an excellent alignment with the [insert name] strategic research centre. It addresses the [insert topic or research question] and fits well with the work of [insert person's name] who has [insert number] of grants dealing with [insert area of research].</p>	26
<p>Supervisor experience/support</p> <p>Both supervisors [insert name 1 and name 2] have strong research track records. They also have a good supervisory track record of timely completions. [Insert name] is one of the Faculty's most productive researchers in terms of both ARC awards and publications.</p>	8
Total score	94

¹ Faculty discretion required - use a multiplier of less than 1.5 if the candidate has had no opportunity for research experience or publications.

<p>Applicant B – International applicant with bachelors, coursework masters with minor thesis, and publications <i>(Background summary: case for high H1 equivalence; good strategic alignment with an institute; principal supervisor less experienced but teamed with more experienced colleagues)</i></p>	
<p>Academic merit The applicant has completed a three-year BSc at [insert name of institution] in [insert name of country] which has been assessed as equivalent to an Australian bachelors degree. Her GPA was 3.88/4. She also completed a Master of Public Health degree at the same university with a GPA of 6.63/7. The masters has been assessed as equivalent to an Australian masters and included a thesis of 20,000 words. The examiners’ reports indicate that they both considered this to be a very high quality thesis and rated it in the top 5% at that institution.</p>	35
<p>Research experience and publications relative to opportunity In the 3 years since completing her masters, the applicant has produced 1 refereed paper in an A* journal (first author) and 5 refereed conference papers (1 sole author, 2 first author and 2 second author).</p>	14
<p>Strategic alignment The proposed research topic has a good alignment with the institute of [insert name]. It will make a useful contribution to the work being done by the [insert name] group with our industry partner [insert name].</p>	24
<p>Supervisor experience/support [Insert name] is developing a good track record as an early career researcher. He has supervised one PhD candidate to completion. He will be supported by two associate supervisors [insert names], both of whom have numerous doctoral completions to their name and are actively researching in areas closely related to the project.</p>	7
<p>Total score</p>	80

<p>Applicant C – Domestic applicant with honours degree <i>(Background summary: actual low H1 for whom a mid-level H1 equivalence case is being made; excellent alignment with SRC; experienced supervisor)</i></p>	
<p>Candidate’s academic merit (case for mid-level H1) The applicant has completed a four-year Bachelor of Arts (Honours) First Class at Deakin. Her final honours mark was 82% which would place her at the lower level of the H1 category. However, she has outstanding referee reports and there are strong grounds for ranking her as a mid-level H1 (see Research Experience below).</p>	30
<p>Research experience and publications relative to opportunity Since completing her Honours degree, she has been working for two years as a research project officer in [name of Government department] and has produced two A journal papers, both sole-author. She was also the main author of three substantial government reports.</p>	16
<p>Strategic alignment The proposed research topic has an excellent alignment with the [insert name] strategic research centre. The centre currently has ARC funding for a project on [insert project field] and the proposed applicant’s project fits clearly within that.</p>	25
<p>Supervisor experience/support The principal supervisor, [insert name], has been a regular winner of ARC Discovery funding. She is chief investigator of a current project (see above). She also has considerable experience as a PhD supervisor, both at her previous institution and at Deakin. She has been principal supervisor for three PhD candidates at Deakin and six at the University of [insert name] and will be mentoring less experienced colleagues with expertise in cognate areas.</p>	8
<p>Total score</p>	79

<p>Applicant D – Domestic applicant with four-year bachelors degree <i>(Background summary: high H1; excellent alignment with SRC; fairly experienced supervisor working in a team)</i></p>	
<p>Academic merit Last year the applicant completed a four-year Bachelor of Engineering at [insert name of institution]. She achieved an average grade of HD in her third and fourth years of the course and her final-year research project was graded HD (87%). Final-year research projects are normally approximately 15,000 words in length. The referees indicate that she was the top student in her fourth year and was on a par with the top students from previous years.</p>	<p>57 (base score of 38 X 1.5 weighting because no opportunity for research experience or publications)</p>
<p>Research experience and publications relative to opportunity No opportunity.</p>	<p>0</p>
<p>Strategic alignment The proposed research topic has an excellent alignment with the [insert name] strategic research centre. The area of [insert discipline/field of research] has made rapid advances at Deakin in the last five years and is a very important part of the University’s growing and mutually-beneficial relationship with the [insert name] industry.</p>	<p>25</p>
<p>Supervisor experience/support [Insert name] was a product of Deakin’s early career researcher program and has since gone on to develop an impressive track record in a short space of time. She now has two doctoral completions. The area adopts a team approach to its research and supervision so the principal supervisor will be well supported by Prof. [insert name] and A/Prof. [insert name] together with the rest of the research group.</p>	<p>8</p>
<p>Total score</p>	<p>90</p>

Applicant E – Domestic applicant with four-year bachelors/honours degree <i>(Background summary: actual low H1 for whom high H1 equivalence case is being made; excellent alignment with institute; experienced supervisors)</i>	
Academic merit The applicant completed a BSc (Honours) in Life Sciences from a leading Australian technical university eight years ago: 81% overall with 80% for the thesis. One of her referees (her Honours supervisor) writes that, based on her previous undergraduate results, she had been expected to perform much better but was involved in a contested divorce with severe financial pressure at the time she was writing her thesis.	30
Research experience and publications relative to opportunity She has worked at AAHL, CSIRO for five years on a flagship program and contributed as co-author (40%) to three A* journals. She has also written three research-based technical reports. In her work she has developed very useful technical expertise which will be central to the conduct of her PhD. AAHL awarded her a Director's Award to visit the [insert name] laboratory in Germany.	18
Strategic alignment Deakin and AAHL have been collaborating for over three years on the [insert name] project. There is an excellent strategic alignment with the work of the [insert name] institute.	25
Supervisor experience/support The applicant will be supervised by A/Prof. [insert name] who is a very experienced supervisor and who has been a regular external grant winner. Dr [insert name] from AAHL will be the external research supervisor. She has supervised PhD candidates previously and has been an examiner for six theses.	10
Total score	83

Applicant F – Domestic applicant with four-year bachelors/honours degree <i>(Background summary: actual mid-level H1; emerging research cluster; experienced supervisor)</i>	
Academic merit The applicant completed a BCom (Honours) one year ago with an overall mark of 84%. Excellent third-year results (straight As).	32
Research experience and publications relative to opportunity Since completing her honours degree a year ago, the applicant has had one refereed journal paper accepted.	15
Strategic alignment The research proposal is groundbreaking and is with the [insert name] which is an emerging research cluster.	25
Supervisor experience/support The applicant will be teamed with a good supervisor whose involvement in the territory is growing. Dr [insert name] is new to Deakin but has supervised four PhD candidates to completion elsewhere. She will be supported by two established staff, one of whom is working in the area of the project while the other works in a cognate area.	8
Total score	80

<p>Applicant G – Domestic applicant with four-year bachelors/honours degree <i>(Background summary: actual H2A for whom low H1 equivalence case is being made; good strategic alignment; new principal supervisor but supported by a team)</i></p>	
<p>Academic merit The applicant completed a BA (Hons) H2A degree (78%) in visual arts nine years ago. His third-year results were excellent.</p>	25
<p>Research experience and publications relative to opportunity Since graduation, the applicant worked as an art practitioner for five years and produced a major solo exhibition to critical acclaim. Since that time he has been employed as a research assistant on project [insert name] at the University of [insert name]. He has produced four research-based professional publications (one of which was sole-authored) and one sole-authored refereed journal paper. He has outstanding referee reports from his current supervisors.</p>	15
<p>Strategic alignment The proposed project will supplement three current research projects in the Centre for [insert name]. These are high-profile projects for the University and involve extensive collaboration with the University of [insert name] and [insert name] University.</p>	26
<p>Supervisor experience/support The principal supervisor recently commenced supervision but has significant expertise in the area of the project. She is supported by two very experienced supervisors, [insert name] and [insert name], and has recent publications with a university press in a leading research series.</p>	7
<p>Total score</p>	73