GUIDELINES FOR PROSPECTIVE HIGHER DEGREES RESEARCH APPLICANTS COMMENCING 2018-2019

RESEARCH OF THE SCHOOL OF DESIGN

Research in the School of Design represents the breadth of contemporary design research and scholarship across the disciplines of communication design, industrial design, and digital design. Our work includes enquiries in and through material practices, digital technologies and environments, and social innovation. The School comprises a vibrant community of researchers and practitioners, including PhD communities, located in RMIT's global locations – Melbourne, Australia; Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, Vietnam; and Barcelona, Spain. We extend our global reach through actively engaging with our Adjunct Professor appointments and international collaborators.

Research in the School contributes to discourses in both applied and exploratory contexts, and has, for the last two Excellence in Research in Australia (ERA) rounds in 2012 and 2015, been assessed as being at or above world standard. Our research is supported by competitive funding including ARC grants, competitive and contract research, and arts and cultural grant schemes. While maintaining a focus on traditional professional practice areas, there is also an innovative approach to interdisciplinary work in the School, which will see the development of programs, research and engagement in digital and human interface design, co-designing with users, design for social innovation and design strategy. Our research is often collaborative and undertaken with end user communities, including specific industry sectors and local communities, and collaborations with colleagues from other disciplines, RMIT schools, and universities.

HIGHER DEGREES RESEARCH PROGRAM

RMIT University has a two decade-long internationally renowned higher degree program of creative practice research undertaken through practice-led and project-based approaches, whilst also supporting a thesis mode of research. 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. Higher Degrees Research (HDR) activity is central to the intellectual life of the School of Design. HDR scholars work in close collaboration with their supervisory team, each other and School colleagues to advance the pursuit of new knowledge and ways of practicing and thinking about design activity and its potential. 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. 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 candidates are supported by at least two supervisors, a research strategies coursework component, and importantly, a rich community of researchers sharing their work twice yearly.

BIANNUAL PRACTICE RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

The School's Higher Degrees by Research (HDR) program culture 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. Candidates presenting their research to a review panel at every PRS is necessary to support the steady progress of research. This process prepares practice research candidates for conveying the knowledge contribution of their research PhD under examination via the unweighted combination of elements, usually including 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. 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.

FIELDS OF RESEARCH

HDR scholars in the School engage with fields of research within existing disciplinary terms – Communication Design, Industrial Design, Digital Design – as well as drawing from multiple disciplines in cross disciplinary cluster/lab settings and/or in terms of specific research investigations, issues or problems. 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.

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 pertains 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.

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 creative 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 are 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 (currently 2018 program DR207) and Master of Design (currently 2018 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 online here.

The School of 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 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 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:

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

2. If you are interested in applying to our Asia or Europe cohorts, you must also obtain the agreed support of the region's PRS coordinator to proceed further.
   For Europe, also CC your EOI to Associate Professor Brad Haylock: brad.haylock@rmit.edu.au
   For Asia, also CC your EOI to Dr Adam Nash: adam.nash@rmit.edu.au

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

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

5. 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 to the RMIT University Application Services website.

Outstanding prospective applicants with interests beyond the listed opportunities, but relevant to the School's and staff's research interests, should include a one-page research proposal, and request advice on suitable and available supervisors. When submitting your formal Expression of Interest (step 5), select one of the generic mode of research (reflective/generative practice/thesis) HDR places.

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 where possible, so as to assist you in attending and gaining an appreciation of the research culture of the School. If application or scholarship deadlines preclude scheduling pre-apps alongside the PRS, they will be scheduled for another time. 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 at least one week prior to the presentation, 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 / master's work if relevant.
- A range of communication and presentation mediums as appropriate.
- 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

Please provide either:

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, 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 PORTFOLIO OF EXPERIENCE

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:

- 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 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, the School's regional PRS coordinator, 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 Design will invite a formal application to the program.

STEP 4. SUBMIT A FORMAL APPLICATION FOR AN 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 enrols 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 2018–2019

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.

Critical Dates for applicants and supporting supervisors:

For **local** Australian & New Zealand applicants intending to commence study in February 2019:

June:	Pre-application interviews during June AU PRS
October:	Pre-application interviews during October AU PRS
	(note: very small window to apply WITH scholarship which is due 31 October) 31
October:	Deadline to apply **with** opportunity for Main Scholarships Round
7 December:	Deadline to apply **without** access to Main Scholarship Round

For **international onshore** applicants who intend to commence study in February 2019 based in Australia and **apply for a scholarship:**

June:	Pre-application interviews June AU PRS
3 September:	Recommended deadline to apply **with** opportunity for Main Round Scholarships. International Onshore applicants must already have admission offers if they wish to apply for scholarships which are due 31 October. Estimate 6-8 weeks between application and offer to allow for sanctions assessments and student visa applications.
31 October:	Deadline for Main Round Scholarships (this is a separate application for International Onshore applicants)

For **international onshore** applicants who intend to commence study in February 2019 based in Australia and **will not** apply for a scholarship:

October:	Pre-application interviews during October Asia PRS October
	Pre-application interviews during October AU PRS November
	Pre-application interviews during EU PRS
7 December:	Deadline to apply **without** opportunity for Main Round Scholarship

For **international offshore** applicants who intend to commence in February 2019:

June:	Pre-application interviews during June AU PRS
October:	Pre-application interviews during October Asia PRS
October:	Pre-application interviews during October AU PRS
November:	Pre-application interviews during EU PRS (note: very small window to apply)
7 December:	Deadline to apply

design.hdr@rmit.edu.au

Higher Degrees by Research (HDR) Administration Team

School of Design RMIT University
GPO Box 2476 Melbourne 3001
Australia
Ph: +61 (0)3 9925 2470

Practice Research Portal

PRS Practice Research Symposium Dates 2018

AU Melbourne: 30 May-3 Jun / 17-21 Oct

ASIA Ho Chi Minh City: 6-8 Apr / 5-7 Oct

EU Barcelona: 27-29 April / 23-25 November

LINKS: the digital form of this document includes important hyperlinks. You can find this document online and access links at: rmit.edu.au/about/our-education/academic-schools/design/research