

Board of Graduate Research

Procedure for awarding Australian Postgraduate Awards (APAs) and Tasmania Graduate Research Scholarships for 2009

1. Role of the University

Each year a number of APAs are allocated by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). Although the University determines the detail of how they are to be awarded to students, the process must be conducted in accordance with DEEWR guidelines. The overriding principle is that awards are based on merit.

Full details of awards are provided in returns to DEEWR who are obliged to verify that their guidelines have been followed. This verification takes the form of challenging rankings or arguments of equivalence which appear to lack adequate support. Decisions made by the University that are not properly justified have an adverse impact on the number of APAs allocated to the University in subsequent years. It is therefore important that we can defend our rankings, which is why we seek justifications and support information from schools to an extent that at times seems excessive.

In line with the direction of the Research Training Scheme Policy, which directs funding to Universities on a high/low cost basis, from the major scholarship round of 2005, the University will split the total number of scholarships available into high and low cost, with the percentage of the split to be determined on an annual basis. For 2009 the high/low cost split is 60/40.

2. Eligibility

The eligibility criteria for APAs are determined by DEEWR. APAs can only be awarded to:

- (1) those who have qualified for a bachelors degree with first class honours or a graduate diploma with first class honours; or
- (2) those with qualifications that are demonstrably equivalent to a bachelors degree with first class honours.

A person who has previously held an APA for more than six months is not eligible for a second award.

Please note to be eligible for the Tasmania Graduate Research Scholarships a minimum of upper second class honours is required.

3. Relevant Information

3.1 Honours equivalence

Where awards are made in category (2), the University must be able to demonstrate to DEEWR that the equivalence of qualifications to first class honours has clearly been established. Qualifications where this may be possible include:

- masters degrees by research;
- masters degrees by coursework, where the research component of the degree is substantial and the Board of Graduate Research is prepared to admit the applicant to candidature; or

- honours degrees below first class but of several years standing where the applicant can demonstrate, generally by publications, that a standard equivalent to first class honours has been achieved.

In these or more complex examples a **case for equivalence with first class honours must be presented**. This case should include a report on the length and content of the program, with particular attention to relating the research component to the honours standard. **The case must be based on research achievement** – such as publications in refereed journals. Where independent assessment of research achievement is available it should be included with the case for equivalence; this may be particularly appropriate when the achievements relate to the visual or performing arts.

A masters degree by research is not automatically equated to first class honours. **Evidence of research achievement and the standard of the thesis must be provided**. If the evidence includes publications with several authors the contribution of the applicant must be clearly identified.

Advice on preparing cases of equivalence is available from the Vanessa Folvig, Scholarships Management Officer, Graduate Research Office.

3.2 Score from undergraduate results

The Graduate Research Unit will calculate an average score from the performance in the third year or equivalent of the undergraduate degree, on the basis of

pass	0
credit	4
distinction	7
high distinction	10

and the course weight of each unit in that year. (see final calculation under 4.)

3.3 Ungraded Passes

Where ungraded passes comprise less than 40% of the total assessment for the year, the ungraded passes will be ignored so that the score is based only on those results within the remaining assessments. Where the upgraded passes comprise greater than 40%, that part of the ungraded assessment above 40% will count as a pass.

3.4 Overseas Qualifications

Whilst overseas qualifications can be equated to their Australian equivalent, the Subcommittee are often not able to interpret the transcript and therefore cannot calculate an undergraduate score.

Where the School has an understanding of a particular international institution and its marking scheme, and have supporting comments from referees of the overseas institution, the School can provide their estimate of the undergraduate score for consideration by the Graduate Awards Subcommittee.

3.5 Rating of honours results by schools

The ranking process is strongly dependent on advice provided by schools. The following information must be provided by the Head of School. Assessments of each of these must involve the judgment of more than one person.

- the grade of honours (i.e. HF, HU or HL)

- the first class honours category A, B or C, describing honours performance relative to other first class honours graduates in the last 5 years, as follows:
 - A in the top third of all first class honours graduates
 - B in the middle third of all first class honours graduates
 - C in the lower third of all first class honours graduate
- a ranked list of all applicants and honours students in the school, regardless of whether the honours students are applicants for APAs or not. This information should be incorporated in the ranked list provided, which lists all honours students and results for the past five years.

Where an equivalence (based on research performance) to a level of honours is claimed, the applicant should be classified according to the equivalence being argued and incorporated into the ranked list accordingly.

The relationship between the undergraduate score, the honours grade and the ranking will be scrutinised by DEEWR. It is recognised that honours and undergraduate results are not always consistent. However, because **cases of this kind may be challenged, an explanation for such inconsistency must be provided in writing.** See 4.2.3

4. Final ranking of applications

4.1 General information

Applications are ranked by the Graduate Awards Sub-Committee for final approval by the Board of Graduate Research.

It is important to note that an APA can only be offered to an applicant whose honours results are confirmed. Applicants whose results are provisional or predicted cannot be included in the ranking until final results are available. Offers of awards cannot be held up by late results, and it is possible that all APAs will be allocated before some late results are available. Heads of School are asked to take this into account when setting dates for assessment meetings in order to avoid putting their students at a disadvantage.

The Subcommittee looks closely at the distribution in categories A, B and C by each School. Statistics over several years should show approximately a third of first class honours graduates in each category, and the Subcommittee may seek comments from schools in which the distribution is significantly different from this. These comments are kept on file for future reference as required.

After the final ranking list has been approved by the Board of Graduate Research, the list provides the basis upon which offers to applicants are made by the Graduate Research Unit. This process can take some time to complete, since an offer which is declined leads to an offer further down the list.

4.2 Assessment procedures for each applicant

To assist in completing the ranking sheet for each applicant, the points below are in the same order as they appear on the form:

4.2.1 Undergraduate score (section 1): The undergraduate score calculation is based on the third year (or equivalent) of an undergraduate degree up to a total

maximum score 10. This is divided by 2 to yield a total maximum of five points. This will automatically appear on the ranking sheet.

4.2.2 Ranking of honours (sections 2 and 3): All applications will again be ranked according to HFA-B-C, HU, HL, HT. Scores will now be assigned to each level of award as follows: HF-A (10), HF-B (9), HF-C (8), HU (6), HL (0), HT (0). If the Honours result is unavailable and an estimate is provided, this must be clearly stated.

- (a) Where **an applicant in first class honours category A or B has an undergraduate score below 6**, the honours category must be justified in writing. Where 'inconsistent' results of this kind are provided without a written justification the honours category will be automatically recorded as C. There is no time at this stage of the process to refer the matter back to the School.
- (b) **The basis of merging other 2009 applicants with the current Honours group to give the ranking must be explained in writing in each case, and particular attention must be given to cases where the ranking is apparently inconsistent with the undergraduate score.**

Schools with limited experience in rating honours graduates in this way should seek advice from Vanessa Folvig in the Graduate Research Office or experienced staff from another School.

4.2.3 Ranking within the school (sections 2 and 3): The School must provide the ranked list of all honours students over the past 5 years (indicating 2008 Honours Students and clearly identifying the applicants for the 2009 round).

4.2.4 Theme area (section 4): If the proposed research topic assessed by the School to be in one of the University theme areas, indicate which theme area (see <http://www.research.utas.edu.au/themes>) NOTE: theme area no longer attracts any points under the ranking system.

4.2.5 Relevant ability (section 5): A case for additional points up to a total maximum of 2 which reflect evidence of relevant ability prior to application at the University of Tasmania may be made by the HOS. Whereas it will not be prescriptive, the following scale will be useful in the determination.

- a) Evidence of significant authorship in refereed journal or refereed conference publication, exhibition or major performance = maximum of 1
The Publication Reference Type (PRT) must be indicated next to each item included, in accordance with university's guidelines on PRTs – an extract of the reference types is attached.
- b) Industry involvement of not less than 3 years = 1
- c) Significant academic award (not subject prizes or Dean's roll awards) = 1 (eg University medal or other external (to the University) related recognition at this level)

Note: "Double dipping" cannot occur in cases of equivalence, for example where a number of publications have been used to argue a case for honours equivalence,

those publications cannot also be granted points through the relevant ability section (a). However, where there are a substantial number of publications, the School should clearly identify those which are being used for the equivalence case and those which are being used for the relevant ability section.

4.2.5 Calculation of final score: The calculation of the total score will be as follows: Honours Score + Undergraduate Score + Relevant Ability Score = Total Score

That is: **HS (0-10) + US (0-5) + RA (0-2) = TS (Max 17)**

4.2.6 Supervisor's name: The name of the intended supervisor must be included with each application. An offer will not be made if this information is not included.

5. Late Scholarship Applications

Applications received up to two working days after the closing date will be accepted and considered as being received by the closing date. Late applications will not normally be accepted. Applications received three days after the closing date and up to and including seven calendar days in total beyond the closing date will be treated as late applications which the Graduate Award Sub-Committee may then consider, together with an accompanying case detailing why the application is late including any exceptional circumstances.