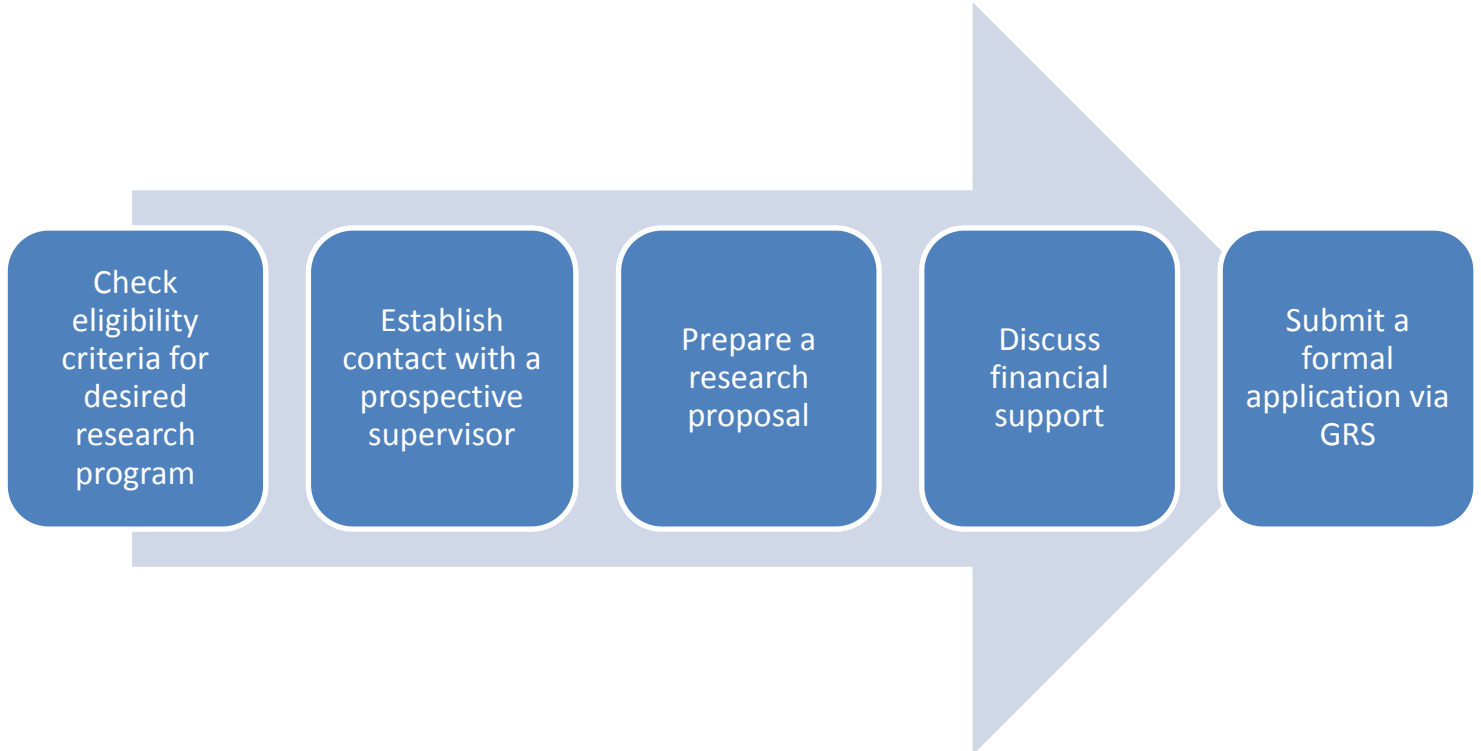School of Public Health and Community Medicine

Higher Degree Research (HDR) Admission Application Guidelines

Applying to do a postgraduate research degree through the School of Public Health and Community Medicine (SPHCM), UNSW

Check eligibility criteria for desired research program

Establish contact with a prospective supervisor

Prepare a research proposal

Discuss financial support

Submit a formal application via GRS

All prospective students should visit the UNSW Graduate Research School website:
https://research.unsw.edu.au/graduate-research

The first step is to assess whether you satisfy the eligibility requirements for the research programs
Please refer to the preliminary self-assessment table. (Also found on the School website)

Further information regarding eligibility requirements and research programs can be found on the Faulty of Medicine website

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The School of Public Health and Community Medicine offers 3 different post-graduate research programs:

➢ **Masters of Philosophy (MPhil)**
   [Program Code – 2713]
   The MPhil program is an excellent option for students who have no previous research experience or for students who do not meet the eligibility criteria for a Masters by Research or PhD. It is a research degree designed to provide research training for candidates who wish to develop competence in research in Public Health, or who wish to progress to a PhD. It comprises one-third coursework (24 units of credit) and two-thirds research (a thesis of less than 40,000 words) and is usually completed in 1.5 years. The thesis can be submitted in a minimum time of 2 semester's full-time equivalent, or a maximum of 4 semester's full-time equivalent.

   Candidates can apply to upgrade during their MPhil to a PhD program, subject to School and Faculty approval.

   Advanced standing may be given for courses completed as part of a Master of Public Health or relevant equivalent, subject to approval.

   Eligibility Requirements for SPHCM:

1. The candidate for the degree shall have been awarded a Bachelor's degree in a relevant discipline from the University of New South Wales, or equivalent program from another university.

2. In exceptional cases, an applicant who submits evidence of such other academic and professional qualifications approved by the Committee may be permitted to enrol in the degree.

3. If the Committee is not satisfied with the qualifications submitted by an applicant the Committee may require the applicant to undergo such assessment or carry out such work as the Committee may prescribe, before permitting enrolment.

   If you have completed an MPH or similar, you may be eligible to apply for advanced standing (credit) for either part or the entire 24UOC coursework component.

   For more information see:
   http://www.handbook.unsw.edu.au/research/programs/current/2713.html
   http://www.handbook.unsw.edu.au/general/current/SSAPO/AwardRulesMPhil.html

➢ **Masters by Research in Public Health (MRes):**
   [Program Code - 2845, 2960, 2885 or 2810]
   The Masters by Research program is designed primarily as training in advanced work and comprises 100% research. A thesis embodying the results of an original investigation or design must be submitted between 1.5 and 2 years full-time equivalent, comprising 40,000 to 70,000 words.

   Candidates can apply to upgrade during their MRes to a PhD program, subject to School and Faculty approval.

The School offers 4 Masters by Research specialisations:
- Public Health (2845)
- Health Administration (2960)
- Health Professions Education (2885)
- Community Medicine (2810)

Eligibility Requirements for SPHCM:
- Faculty of Medicine
- School of Public Health & Community Medicine

For more information see:
http://www.handbook.unsw.edu.au/general/current/SSAPO/MedicineMRes.html

➢ **Doctor of Philosophy in Public Health (PhD):**
[Program Code 1835 or 1841]
Applicants to the PhD program would normally be expected to have prior research experience. The PhD is designed as advanced research in a specialised area and comprises 100% research. Candidates are expected to submit an original thesis which substantially contributes to knowledge in the field. The thesis is usually expected to be between 75,000 and 100,000 words and submission is usually expected after 3 years full-time equivalent.

Eligibility Requirements for SPHCM can be found at the Faculty of Medicine link below:
http://med.unsw.edu.au/doctor-philosophy-phd

Articulation from Masters by Coursework to PhD program

In addition to a suitable research proposal and the agreement of two potential supervisors, students with a coursework Master's degree from the SPHCM will be considered for entry to the PhD program if they have:
1. Successfully undertaken at least 12 UOC as research. This should include a 6 UOC Major Project and a 6 UOC Independent Study, or the 6 UOC Major Project and a research-related course, such as Qualitative Research Methods, Advanced Biostatistics, Advanced Epidemiology or Applied Research Methods.
2. Average Credit or above for Masters Coursework and project.
3. A letter of support from the Head of School or delegate

For more information see:
http://www.handbook.unsw.edu.au/research/programs/current/1835.html

http://www.handbook.unsw.edu.au/research/programs/current/1841.html

http://www.handbook.unsw.edu.au/general/current/SSAPO/AwardRulesPhD.html

Please note: Under GRS guidelines, the enrolment of PhD students is subject to confirmation.

In order for your candidature to be confirmed, your progress must be assessed as satisfactory. This will take place at your first progress review between 6 and 9 months (FTE) after enrolment. If you are a PhD candidate and your candidature is not confirmed, your candidature may be transferred to a Masters by Research degree.

For full details please see:
https://www.gs.unsw.edu.au/policy/documents/aprprocedure.pdf

Where applicable: Students should check their scholarship conditions to see if payment will be continued in the event of a downgrade to Masters by Research.

Step 2 – Establish contact with a prospective supervisor

The next step for you is to establish contact with a prospective supervisor. **The responsibility to finalise supervision rests with you as a prospective research student.**

There are a number of websites which may help you find an academic supervisor for your research. See the list below:

1. http://www.sphcm.med.unsw.edu.au/research/research-expertise

2. http://www.sphcm.med.unsw.edu.au/centres-units

3. http://med.unsw.edu.au/research

4. https://research.unsw.edu.au/researcher

5. http://med.unsw.edu.au/find-a-person

These websites will help you identify if a prospective supervisor is available in your area of interest within the school or associated research centres.

Please send your prospective supervisor an email introducing yourself/background and outlining your proposed research. When contacting a prospective supervisor please ensure to send the attached:

- **Detailed CV** which clearly lists employment experience (positions held and responsibilities), research experience, publications with citations and   qualifications completed.
- A brief **Research Proposal** (approx. 1 page) which outlines at the very least potential research area(s)/topic, research aim, proposed research methodology and expected research outcome. This will later be developed into a more detailed proposal as noted in step 3.

All research students require 2 supervisors (can be a primary and secondary supervisor or 2 joint supervisors). Once you have one supervisor who is willing to consider supervising you, you should discuss an appropriate second supervisor with them.

Your supervisor will also be required to use the eligibility self-assessment table to ensure you are eligible for your prospective program.

Finding a prospective supervisor does not guarantee entry to a research program. There is a separate University process for consideration of ability to undertake a postgraduate research degree. However, this consideration occurs once a prospective supervisor is identified and a detailed proposal is prepared.

Please note: For students contemplating a period of overseas study:
i)   If the duration of the student overseas is more than 3 months, then in-country supervision from a qualified staff member at a reputable institution must be arranged, as well as infrastructure support;
ii)   Regular contact with the primary supervisor and co-supervisor in Australia must be undertaken (at least once a month by Skype or phone);
iii)   In person attendance at confirmation review in Sydney (first progress review of candidature for PhD students)

For Masters by Research, MPhil & PhD:

The School of Public Health & Community Medicine requires a detailed proposal (3-5 pages) which includes a time line. You should **finalise this proposal with the input of your proposed supervisor**.

Both a PhD and a Masters by research are awarded on the basis of a thesis alone. Although students may take preparatory course-work, this is not counted as part of the award (this is quite different to USA Universities). This means that demonstrating a capacity for independent research, and a readiness to begin working on your chosen topic is an important part of the application.

The MPhil is awarded on the basis of successful completion of coursework and thesis. Applicants are still required to submit a detailed research proposal.

Note: as part of the application process, your proposal will be peer reviewed to see if it is a viable PhD/Masters proposal.

Please use the following headings for the proposal:

1.   Abstract (max: 250 words)

2.   Project title

3.   Background and rationale
   - Establish what the problem is drawing on evidence from peer reviewed references. A comprehensive literature review is not required. But must draw on a few key references to clearly explain and justify the problem that the research will address.
   - Identify clearly the gap in the literature that the proposed research will address
   - Should include research purpose/aim, and research question(s) and/or hypotheses all of which are well aligned. These should also align well with the proposed research design.

4.   Sub-questions/objectives (if relevant)
   - These should align well with the main research questions

5.   Research design
   - Brief description of the broad research approach (qualitative or quantitative or mixed method) drawing on some evidence to justify the appropriateness of the proposed research approach.
   - Brief outline of the research setting, methods of data collection (example survey, qualitative interviews etc), who the participants would be and a brief explanation of how participants will be accessed.
   - In this section you are not required to provide details of sample size calculation. Identifying minimum sample size required would be helpful.
   - Not required to include details of how data will be analysed.
   - Most important aspect for this section is the alignment and appropriateness of the research approach. Research approach and data collection methods must align well with the problem, the research aim and research hypothesis/question. Proposed research approach and methods of data collection must be appropriate to the research aim.
   - If this research is a part of a bigger research project, provide a brief description of the overall research project and a brief explanation of how this proposed research fits into the bigger research project.

6.   Anticipated outcomes/significance (point form)
   - Indicate the novelty of the proposed research in terms of contribution to either the global body of knowledge, or existing theory, and practice of the relevant discipline.

7. Timeframe

8. Anticipated budget

*Please also refer to the criteria used by peer reviewers for reviewing research proposals, below.

Criteria for reviewing Research Proposal (as used by peer reviewers):

Broad Criteria	Specific Criteria
Background and rationale • Does the proposal convincingly articulate the research problem as important to public health? • Is a clear and significant gap in the literature identified? • Is there a clearly articulated research question/ hypothesis	• Uses evidence from peer reviewed literature to establish the research problem. Or uses theory to justify the significance of the problem and the significance of the contribution to the field. (May draw on key pieces of work, seminal articles or key work in the area but is not expected to provide a comprehensive literature review. Rather just a few key references.) • Gap in the literature clearly identified and the research aim and purpose addresses this gap. • Focuses on a significant public health and/or medical education topic. • Is appropriate in scope for a PhD • Proposed research is doable • Research question/hypothesis clearly articulated and aligns well with the research problem, and research aim.
Research Design • Is the overall research approach pertinent and relevant to the research problem/ phenomenon to be studied?	• Overall approach is appropriate to the research problem, research question/hypothesis and research goal/aim. • Methods of data collection briefly described. (No details required but should identify if it is survey research, RCT, in depth interviews, focus group discussions etc.) • Brief description of the research context provided. • Proposed methods of data collection doable, appropriate to the context and participants. • Participants feasible and accessible • Minimum sample size suggested
Anticipated outcomes/significance	• Clear identification of the output of the research. • Output fits into the relevant discipline and practice. • Contributes to the global body of knowledge, or existing theory and/or public health/medical education practice.
Timeframe	• In the case of qualitative research design time adequate for establishing rapport with participants, reflection during analysis, returning to literature and allows for needed flexibility. • In the case of quantitative research design, time adequate to access the required sample size.
Anticipated Budget	• Adequate

Reference: Morse, J.M. (2003) A review Committee's Guide for Evaluating Qualitative Proposals, *Qualitative Health Research,* 13 (6), 833-851

Step 4 – Discuss financial support

A core responsibility of the supervisor is advising the candidate to ensure he/she has appropriate resources and support for the research program agreed. Please discuss the questions on the financial declaration form with your supervisor.

For information about some of the scholarships available through UNSW's Graduate Research School please refer to the GRS Scholarship website at: https://research.unsw.edu.au/postgraduate-research-scholarships

This website is updated regularly and contains relevant contact details and dates. There are also a wide range of scholarships from alternative sources available

Please note: You will need to ensure that you have access to funding for your research and MPhil/PhD/Masters-related expenses from other sources (this may include self-funding, scholarships, joint grants with supervisors through a Centre, etc).

The School's funding opportunities can be viewed at the below link:
http://www.sphcm.med.unsw.edu.au/current-students/postgraduate-research/funding-opportunities

http://sphcm.med.unsw.edu.au/future-students/postgraduate-research/scholarships

Postgraduate Research Student – Financial Declaration

*Source of Funding: As an applicant to UNSW, you must demonstrate that you can financially support yourself (& any dependants) for the duration of your studies. This may be through applying for a UNSW Research Scholarship, an alternative scholarship or sponsorship (provided by a source external to UNSW), or through self-funding. Before your application can be considered, you must complete the GTE/Financial Declaration Form and, if required, submit evidence of your capacity to fund all living costs, fees and other associated costs. For required fund amounts, please visit Fees & Costs.

International applicants -
- If you have already been offered an external sponsorship or scholarship, the Sponsorship/Scholarship Agreement will need to be provided. If not granted yet, this can be provided at a later date.
- If self-funded, you will need to provide:
    - Bank statements from last 6 months, showing funds available for a minimum of 1.5 years for a Masters, or minimum 3 years for a PhD. For required fund amounts, please visit https://research.unsw.edu.au/fees-and-costs; and
    - If the bank account is held under a different name, the account holder must declare that the funds will be used for this student's research degree fees and costs

Step 5 – Submit application

GRS Application

The UNSW Graduate Research School (GRS) is the central administrative and support unit for all higher degree research students and their supervisors at UNSW.

You will need to complete the online application form as outlined on the GRS How to Apply website.

You must seek your prospective supervisor's agreement with your proposal before you submit your online application to the Graduate Research School to enrol in a higher degree research program.

Supporting Documentation that must be submitted with your application	Completed
A research proposal: 3-5 pages (with headings as specified on Page 6). Please note that all proposals will be blind peer reviewed by an academic within the proposed field	
Confirmation from your proposed supervisors that they are willing to be your supervisor throughout the duration of your research. The SPHCM requires either an email or letter from both your primary and secondary supervisors.	
A **CV** outlining your work and research experience, including academic qualifications and publications (peer reviewed journal articles and book chapters), conference proceedings and reports. Publications, conference proceedings and reports must be written using APA or author-date referencing style and citation.	
Original or certified copies of **academic transcripts** of previous degrees	
MPhil only: If you wish to apply for **advanced standing** for coursework, please state this and nominate how many units of credit you wish to apply for (max. 24UOC), names of courses and name of degree (eg. MPH), institute which awarded the degree	
Evidence of English proficiency for International applicants such as an IELTS test completed in the last two years. For alternative evidence considered acceptable, please visit: https://www.unsw.edu.au/english-requirements-policy	
Evidence of Australian citizenship/permanent residency if you wish to apply as a local applicant (birth certificate or passport) **Evidence of citizenship for international applicants** (birth certificate or passport)	
Financial declaration	

Please note: Your application cannot be assessed unless all the above documentation is uploaded with your online application