



The Monash Postgraduate Association (MPA) submission to the
Graduate Research Committee in response to
HDR candidature policy changes.

July 2015

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Introduction

The MPA received a number of unsolicited complaints from postgraduates following the university's decision late last year to impose changes to HDR candidature policy, and in particular, the decision to make those changes retrospective. In addition, the MPA dealt with several cases where postgraduates had been detrimentally affected by the policy changes. The relevant policy changes are summarised in Attachment 1.

The MPA ran an information and Q&A session presented by MIGR staff on the policy changes (attended by 12 postgraduates). A repeat session was organised by MEGA (Mechanical Engineering Graduate Association) for their members, and attracted over 250 postgraduates from Engineering and IT, with a small number of postgraduates from Medicine and Science. The MPA staff received verbal feedback from postgraduates attending these sessions.

The MPA subsequently issued a call to the broader postgraduate community for positive and negative comments on the policy changes and received 34 emails from postgraduates. One postgraduate independently set up an online petition¹ that attracted 120 signatures and over 30 comments.

This submission is by no means a comprehensive survey of postgraduate opinion; it is meant to reflect the current feeling of the postgraduate community. Comments made by postgraduates about the policy changes have been quoted throughout this submission in italics.

“I understand the university’s desire to see that all HDR students complete in a timely manner, however it is in the nature of research that significant delays can and do regularly occur. It is also important that some sense of certainty can be had regarding the future timeline of the research, and the rules under which it is to be conducted. For this reason, I and several other HDR students who I am in contact with are quite perturbed by the changes which have been made to the candidature and milestone rules, since the commencement of our programmes. The issue we have with these changes is that they have been imposed on us post hoc when we are part-way through significant, stressful, and long-term research projects...”

HDR candidate

Although the MPA has received complaints about many of the policy changes, postgraduates are especially unhappy about the “*shifting of the goalposts*” mid-candidature.

This submission highlights some of the problems postgraduates are experiencing as a result of these policy changes. It is hoped that the university will reconsider its position on these matters and take up the recommendations made in this paper.

¹ The petition can be viewed online at <https://www.change.org/p/monash-institute-of-graduate-research-migr-repeal-the-retrospective-application-of-new-candidature-rules-for-higher-degree-by-research-hdr-students-at-monash-university>

1. Retrospective application of policy changes

Although postgraduates understand the university's desire and need to occasionally make changes to policies and procedures, in this instance the changes have been applied retrospectively to currently enrolled postgraduates. In almost all other instances of policy change at Monash University, the university has honoured the application of policies existing at the time of enrolment.

Whether or not the university has the legal right to impose these changes mid-way through candidature could be debated if postgraduates had the time, money and inclination to challenge such a decision. However, of greater concern is that the decision is seen as unethical; in the minds of postgraduates, this represents a breach of the agreement they believed they had with the university when they enrolled in their degrees. It has damaged the trust that existed between that cohort of postgraduates and the university.

“...the blanket, retrospective application of all policy changes is of great concern. As I understand it, as enrolled candidates, Monash University made a contractual offer to us in relation to our enrolment conditions, which we accepted by enrolling. If the University chooses to vary this contract, I expect that we would be well within our rights to not accept the variation but to retain the original conditions we agreed to. This is why other institutions have the staged introduction of changes to study programs”.

HDR candidate

For many postgraduates, the retrospective application of these policies has adversely affected their research programs and their progress. Concrete examples of hardship caused by the retrospective application of these policy changes are included in the following sections.

“...the application of these rules retrospectively ignores that students, such as myself, have been operating under a previously defined set of rules (the rules we originally signed up to), and our research programmes have a certain amount of inertia and cannot be at short notice tailored to suit newly imposed requirements.”

HDR candidate

Recommendation 1: That all research postgraduates have their candidatures governed by the conditions in place at the time of enrolment.

2. All milestones becoming hurdles

One student commented positively on the “*clarity and standardization of the milestone dates, requirements and review process*” under the new policy changes.

However, the majority of postgraduates felt that the extra hurdles created additional stress and work for them at a time when there was already increasing pressure over timelines. Students reported taking up to four weeks out of their research time to prepare for hurdles.

“I recently lost over a week of my research time preparing for my 'new and improved' mid candidature review. I do not feel like this made my PhD advance further over night!”

HDR candidate

When the milestones were originally introduced, it was made very clear by MIGR (then MRGS) that only the first milestone (confirmation) would be considered a hurdle. The 2013 Doctoral handbook, described the role of the mid-candidature review panel:

Section 3.10.2.2 states: The panel should also make any appropriate recommendations to assist the progress of the candidate and, if any specific problems are identified, determine appropriate actions to address these. The panel should also allocate responsibilities to implement these actions.

and the role of the pre-submission review panel:

Section 3.11.2.2 states: The review panel’s role is to provide general feedback on the material presented to them. The panel must discuss both the written submission and oral presentation with the candidate and provide critical feedback to the candidate on the strengths and weaknesses of the work presented and the delivery of the presentation. The panel should also make any appropriate recommendations to assist the preparation of the thesis for submission and the candidate should be encouraged to consider incorporating these recommendations into their thesis.

The reasoning was that an appropriate amount of time should be given to a candidate to demonstrate their potential. However, it was also recognised that the university needed to inform a candidate as early as possible if it became apparent that they did not have the ability or commitment to succeed. Both the university and the MPA were in agreement that this was a fair and reasonable process for the university and the student. Once a student was confirmed, it was emphasised that the process should *support* the student to completion, and for this reason, the two remaining milestones were deliberately not set as hurdles, but as opportunities to ensure that both candidate and supervisor were on track.

“Turning the existing milestones into hurdles is unfair and adds unnecessary pressure. Confirmation at the 12-month stage is a sound method of identifying those who are committed to their project and those whose efforts may be better spent elsewhere. Once this is complete, students should be free to expand on their ideas with the later milestones acting as points to stop and

take stock, redirecting or focusing efforts as necessary. However, switching these to hurdles keeps a tight constraint on those in the program, restraining them with fear. Even the use of the word 'hurdle' shifts the tone of milestones from helpful pit stops to assess progress and make decisions regarding future work into points of stress and potential failure, even giving the Milestone Review Panel an adversarial feel instead of a supportive one."

HDR candidate

The reality is, and always has been, that if a student is not making appropriate progress the university can, at any time in their candidature, initiate termination procedures. While MIGR argues that the introduction of two additional hurdles will address concerns about lack of consistency in procedure across the faculties, it was unnecessary to change the milestones to hurdles to address this problem.

The change from milestone to hurdle therefore seems only to provide an easy point at which the university can terminate a candidate. It is not appropriate that a milestone at the end of a three-year period should be viewed in anyway at all as an invitation for the university to consider termination. The situation where a postgraduate has completed three years of a PhD and fails the final review is not only calling into question the student's academic ability; it questions the university's role in this outcome in terms of the effectiveness of the selection and confirmation processes, the level of supervision and guidance provided, and the allocation of resources. However, it is only the student who will bear the brunt of this decision.

What message does this send to postgraduates? The message is that the university takes no responsibility for poor and inadequate supervision, nor does it take any responsibility for making an informed decision to terminate at an appropriate point in candidature (confirmation) and prevent a candidate wasting years of their time.

"Personally, the idea of my mid-candidature review suddenly becoming a hurdle demotivated me and caused my work to suffer. It was motivation from my supervisors which led me to get back on track, not the negative pressure from the university. It may be true that an extended candidature causes a loss of motivation but, instead of focusing on trying to force completion, the university should be working with supervisors to help them identify the main reasons for the extended time and find ways to motivate students, not making it easier to simply kick out those who need help. Nurture is far more helpful than pressure, especially 3 years into a difficult and frustrating process."

HDR candidate

Recommendation 2: That the mid-candidature review and pre-submission (final) review revert to being milestones instead of hurdles.

3. Acceptable reasons for milestone extensions

MIGR has recently reduced the list of reasons that will be accepted in support of an application for an extension to a milestone (now hurdles), citing that it must be a matter that is “beyond the student’s control”. Equipment breakdown, ethics approval delay, change of supervisor and change of project are deemed acceptable reasons; lack of supervision, sickness and employment are not.

Lack of supervision

Lack of supervision can mean that a student has no supervision at all (because a supervisor has left the university) or it can mean that the allocated supervisor is not effectively supervising the student. In the latter case, postgraduates are only too aware of the negative implications of complaining about their supervisors.

“...placing the onus on students to complain about supervisors puts enormous pressure on students. They are unsure about the implications for their future within their department/faculty and also within the broader professional field - particularly in areas where researchers are known to one another.”

HDR candidate

It is difficult to understand how MIGR can argue that a lack of supervision is within the student’s control. It is made clear in the Doctoral Handbook that the provision of supervision is the university’s responsibility.

Section 5.2.2.2 states “When a supervisor is no longer authorised or is unable to continue in the role, the head of the academic unit formally advises the student within 10 working days and initiates procedures to identify and appoint a suitable replacement in consultation with the student.”

This is possibly the most unreasonable of all the changes imposed by MIGR, as this is a blatant abrogation of the university’s responsibility.

Recommendation 3: That ‘lack of supervision’ be accepted as a bone fide reason in support of an application for an extension to a milestone.

Sickness

MIGR’s argument against accepting sickness as a legitimate reason for extension applications is that students should be using their four weeks of sick leave to stop the clock on their candidature. However, becoming ill is not something that one chooses nor something over which one has any control – the MPA can cite many cases where the progress of HDRs has been severely disrupted by sickness and in the past MIGR has, appropriately, taken this into consideration when determining extension applications. This policy change ignores the fact that:

- many postgraduates are dependent on their scholarship income to survive. Once their paid sick leave entitlements are used, these postgraduates must resume studies in order to continue to be able to pay for accommodation and food, and so they struggle on with their research under duress; and

- serious illnesses, both mental and physical, can render a student incapable of responding to emails, filling out forms and operating in a normal manner. Should a postgraduate experience this type of illness for a period greater than the requisite four weeks leave, it can have a significant impact on progress and should be taken into account when determining milestone extensions.

Recommendation 4: That serious sickness be accepted as a bone fide reason in support of an application for an extension to a milestone.

Employment

Although it is reasonable to assume that employment is within the students' control, there is one exception to this, and that is on Malaysia campus where HDRs are required to work 10 hours per week as a condition of receipt of stipend. Research postgraduates on Malaysia campus cannot choose to reduce their working hours if they discover that the time spent on work is detrimental to their PhD progress.

Recommendation 5: That for HDRs enrolled through the Malaysia campus only, employment be accepted as a bona fide reason in support of an application for an extension to a milestone.

Reasons beyond the student's control

One student reported of a fellow HDR student who was unable to continue to work on his project for several months due to international sanctions, causing a significant delay to his confirmation. The student was left with four months between confirmation and mid-candidature review, so applied for an extension to the mid-candidature review, but this was refused by MIGR.

If the basic principle behind approving extensions is that the situation must be "beyond the student's control" then the application of international sanctions to a student by the Australian government must surely fall into that category. However the problem is wider than just this example; this change in policy reflects a change in tone, and where once MIGR would take into consideration any life matter affecting a student's progress, the new policies are applied without flexibility or thought, and present an organisation intent on improving completion times at any price.

Recommendation 6: That all applications for extensions to milestones are decided on a case-by-case basis, with all matters beyond the student's control taken into consideration.

For postgraduates enrolling *pre-2015*, not only have they had their mid-year and final-year milestones replaced with hurdles, but they are also being denied any extensions to those hurdles (other than confirmation). On the other hand, postgraduates enrolling *post-2015* can apply for up to 3 months extension for each hurdle. Postgraduates who were currently enrolled at the time of the policy changes get the worst of both worlds; all their milestones become hurdles and yet they are denied the milestone extensions provided to newly enrolling postgraduates.

See Recommendation 1.

4. Backdating applications for sick leave and intermission

Postgraduates are now required to submit a sick leave application within 10 days of the leave beginning. Under their original conditions of enrolment, a sick leave certificate could be submitted anytime within the period of leave.

“At the beginning of the year I had to take carer’s leave in an urgent way for my Mum who had an unexpected debilitating operation. I submitted my leave certificate 12 days after the start of the leave (but still in the leave period) and it was at first rejected by MIGR. It took over two weeks and a lot of emails/calls for them to take my case to the academic director to ascertain whether I could be granted leave that my Award clearly and unequivocally states I could have. In the end I was granted the leave, but it was a ridiculous amount of hoopla and added stress for me to deal with.”

HDR candidate

Not surprisingly, it is often difficult to predict exactly how long an illness will last. One postgraduate highlighted the adverse effects (of refusing to backdate leave applications) on students suffering from mental illnesses.

“It might be worth pointing out that students may only realise in retrospect that impact of illness on their study. This is more the case with mental illness. In the case of mental illness, students may not be forthcoming about problems to their supervisors because of the potential consequences for their professional careers”.

HDR candidate

Once the four weeks sick leave is exhausted, even if the student is able to exist without their scholarship income, it is not always clear whether or not an intermission should be taken. It would be reasonable to allow for a short period of backdating for intermission and sick leave.

Recommendation 7: That applications for sick leave and intermission are able to be backdated for up to three weeks.

5. End of candidature

At the end of candidature students can apply for an extension, which will be granted only where the candidate can make a very strong and compelling argument. What if there are no exceptional circumstances? What if the candidate has progressed as originally planned and simply requires more time? By applying this policy change retrospectively, postgraduates who have started with a four year PhD plan are being pressured to conform to a policy designed to fit a 3 year PhD plan.

A number of postgraduates have reported applying for such an extension and having it refused, despite the fact that their research is progressing in line with their originally submitted and accepted plan.

“Under the new scheme one must apply (post 4 years) for a three month extension, repeatedly, until the HDR programme is complete. I have just applied for my second extension and MIGR have (at least initially) refused it. Of course I expect that in the end I will get the extension, but I find it unreasonable to have this uncertainty placed on me, and I believe that requiring a new extension application every three months is particularly onerous, especially at a time when HDR students are stressed and striving for completion. I also wonder what happens if extension is indeed refused? Do I then simply leave, without a PhD?”

HDR candidate

For any postgraduate on track to complete, a refusal by MIGR to extend the candidature beyond four years is simply counter-productive. Postgraduates who have almost completed and are then refused an extension, will be discontinued in good standing by MIGR. They must then apply to reenrol, which requires filling out a substantial enrolment application. There is no stated minimum length of time between being discontinued in good standing and reenrolling, so presumably a student could fill out the forms to discontinue in good standing and within minutes, apply to reenrol. This is a time-wasting process, not to mention the additional stress inflicted on a student who is close to completion and already under pressure.

Postgraduates also raised concerns about having to reapply every three months at the end of their candidatures when they were already working hard to complete.

“...scientific research cannot be properly done in 3 month blocks. Often it will take me three months simply to get a single computer code working. The uncertainty and stress this imposes is unnecessary and counterproductive to the proper conduct of scientific research.”

HDR candidate

In addition, there was a great deal of uncertainty around what constituted an “acceptable reason” for extension, despite many students having attended a MIGR information session on the policy changes. Two postgraduates were concerned about the decision to extend candidature (or not) being made by MIGR rather than their supervisors.

“It should be the domain, and solely the domain, of the student and the advisor of the student to determine the appropriate stage of research at which submission is warranted. If there must be a regular review on a short time-scale, it should be conducted in a meeting with the student's supervisor and examining committee, in a similar manner to the mid-candidature review. This would be a significantly more effective method of review than the current procedure in which an administrator with no experience or knowledge of the project is presented with limited written information.”

HDR candidate

It is questionable to apply this policy to any postgraduate, but especially concerning when applied retrospectively to a group of postgraduates who started and designed their research projects under completely different research conditions.

See recommendation 1.

Recommendation 8: That extensions to candidature be granted where students have the support of their supervisors, reasonable progress can be demonstrated and an estimated completion date is submitted.

Recommendation 9: That candidature extensions be of an appropriate length to reflect the estimated completion date.

6. Minimum three-month re-enrolment

Some cohorts of postgraduates (see Attachment 1 for details) who have been discontinued in good standing and then apply to reenrol in order to submit their theses, must do so for a minimum of three months. For international postgraduates, the fees associated with an additional three-month enrolment are a substantial financial impost.

“MIGR recently (December 2014) changed the policy for the thesis submission deadline, removing the 3 week grace period for submission and not allowing a student’s candidature to lapse before thesis submission. This policy is effective 1 January 2015, just 3 weeks after the notice by email. As I was very near my thesis submission due date, this did not provide me with sufficient time to reschedule my thesis submission. I had to apply for extension for which I am being imposed fees due to my international student status...I would like to highlight to the MPA that this is a disadvantage international students are facing and voice my objection against retroactive, and especially last minute policy changes.”

HDR candidate

Several postgraduates have reported attending the MIGR office with a completed thesis, having also completed all pre-submission requirements, and being told that they must first be enrolled for three months before their thesis can be accepted.

This is surely bureaucracy at its worst and defies all logic; to unnecessarily delay the submission of a thesis is not in the interests of the university or the student. If postgraduates have fulfilled all the requirements set as a condition of completing their PhDs then they should be free and indeed *encouraged* to submit their theses for examination without any minimum enrolment period imposed on them.

See recommendation 1.

Recommendation 10: That there should not be a minimum period of reenrolment applied to postgraduates who are returning after having been discontinued in good standing.

At their March 2015 meeting the MPA Executive Committee agreed that postgraduates who were required to reenrol for a minimum period of three months under the new MIGR policy should not be charged Student Services Amenities Fees

(SSAF). To that end, the MPAEC determined that they would forgo their 36% share of SSAF from this cohort. The MPA wrote to the Chief Operating Officer and Senior Vice-President requesting that the university also agree not to collect their share of the postgraduate SSAF from this cohort, and that an administrative process for identifying these postgraduates be developed. This request is currently under consideration.

Recommendation 11: That where postgraduates are required to reenrol for three months to submit an already completed thesis, no Student Services Amenities Fee (SSAF) be applied. *This recommendation to be actioned by the MPA and University Chief Operating Office.*

7. Coursework component

Two postgraduates commented positively on the introduction of coursework to their PhD programs. There were no objections received about the decision to include coursework in the PhD program, but there were several concerns raised about the quality and relevance of the coursework units to the research. Clearly, this varied between faculties, who are responsible for setting coursework units and deciding which will be compulsory.

“The program has limited relevance to some students...The program is proving stressful as I must pass this unit in order to progress through confirmation at 12 months, regardless of its relevance to my PhD research.”
HDR candidate

Recommendation 12: That faculties review all coursework units in relation to their relevance to research programs and benefit to HDR candidates.

Several students commented on the time taken up with coursework units that they felt could be better spent on their research. One student commented that the first three months of their candidature had been spent completing two compulsory coursework units, which the student had found difficult as they were in areas where they had had no prior training. This particular student had been left with only six months to prepare for confirmation, which they believed was inadequate.

There were three complaints about lack of administrative organisation; poor communication about starting dates of units and identifying which units were compulsory, and failing to provide unit outlines and assessment prior to the start of the unit.

Many postgraduates felt under pressure with the introduction of coursework units taking time out of their research, and the message coming from MIGR that extensions would be more difficult to obtain.

“I fully support the requirement for coursework, but not in its current form. No extra time has been allowed for completion, insufficient extra funding has been provided to the departments, and the courses offered are not worth the time spent on them.”

HDR candidate

When the introduction of compulsory coursework was being discussed by GRC (then MRGS), it was acknowledged that in order to ensure the quality of research was not adversely affected, postgraduates would need more time to complete their PhDs and scholarships would need to be extended to cover the additional time. Neither of these two proposals eventuated – to the contrary, candidates have been placed under increasing pressure to complete in less time.

Recommendation 13: That candidature be automatically extended to accommodate the length of time lost to compulsory coursework units.

8. Research training skills

Prior to the policy changes, faculties had varying arrangements in place for minimum research training hours required as part of their PhD programs. For example, in one faculty, HDRs could be credited for faculty-approved external seminars and activities. This cohort of postgraduates have been informed by MIGR that under the new policy **all** their training must be completed internally through MIGR and faculty offerings.

“The MIGR office informed us that we are to be transitioned to a new system that requires 120 hours of training all to be done internally through Monash.

- 1. This is not the structure of the course we agreed to when signing into the degree.*
- 2. There was no consultation.*
- 3. No alternative options were presented.*
- 4. I can see no reason why we should have to fulfil new requirements not part of the course we have signed into.*
- 5. The usual approach is for new students to adopt the new system. That was the method used when the 96 hour system was first introduced 2 years ago – the current students were not required to complete any training.”*

Submitted on behalf of all HDR candidates in one department.

Postgraduates see this change as onerous and of little value to them, especially those who are in the last year of their candidature and believed their training requirements to have been fulfilled some time ago.

There was also a concern that faculties were not properly prepared for the roll-out of the research training skills component and this had resulted in the poor quality of internal training on offer. Postgraduates were frustrated that valuable external activities were not being formally recognised as training.

“In the original system we were able to access training from outside Monash that would count as RTS hours. As the system is in its infancy this is a much better idea - there just isn't that many hours offered by Monash that are relevant (yet) and there are many non-Monash events that are highly valuable.”

HDR candidate

Many postgraduates were scathing about the quality of the training they were required to complete as part of their PhD programs. Most students did not distinguish between training provided by MIGR and training provided by the faculty when submitting comments.

“...compulsory training activities – many of which were laughably useless, such as the online multiple choice exercise on Ethics (terrible content, terrible format, many complaints...”

HDR candidate

One postgraduate reported having to delay their confirmation by two months because the course they were required to complete before confirmation was not on offer. One postgraduate reported being informed by his faculty that reading the Doctoral Handbook would count as one hour of training. Other students reported on a lack of clarity, inconsistencies and arbitrary decision-making within faculties when determining which activities would be accepted toward the training skills quota.

One student commented that many of the training activities on offer were “*not relevant to the individual person or research*” and there was a general view by postgraduates that the training hours were an obstacle to be overcome, rather than a positive educative experience.

See recommendation 1.

Recommendation 14: That faculties and MIGR review all training skills units on offer to ensure quality and relevance.

Recommendation 15: That MIGR review the offer of a PhD model that requires the compulsory inclusion of 120 hours of training skills.

9. Quality of the PhD experience

Many postgraduates raised concerns about quality. Although students recognised the advantages of completing a thesis as quickly as possible, they did not want this completion to come at the expense of the quality of their research. They expressed concern that the squeeze on candidature time and the emphasis on pushing students through in the minimum possible time would inevitably result in a poorer quality research output.

Students saw a drop in the quality of their research as detrimental to their own research careers as well as to the university's reputation. They expressed the belief that the quality of the research training and research output should be paramount, and that university administrative operations should be supporting that goal rather than obstructing it.

“The new emphasis on completion within 3 years as a necessity, rather than an estimate, gives the impression that the university is not focusing on producing good research but on mechanical generation of PhD qualifications.”

HDR candidate

They expected the coursework units and research training to be offered at an appropriate level, to be challenging and to make a significant contribution to their PhD experience, and were frustrated when this was not the case.

“The number of hours I've filled with waste-of-time busy work, while stuff that was actually useful hasn't been counted...(and then to have them change the goalposts anyway).”

HDR candidate

Postgraduates wanted a high quality experience from a Monash University PhD and they expected the university to support them in this endeavour.

Conclusion

The most frequent complaint was about the retrospective application of the policy changes. Postgraduates saw this as a breach of their agreement with the university and disruptive to their research and wanted the university to reverse this decision.

“There is an overwhelming feeling among students that the goal posts are constantly moving. This takes away many, many research hours and contributes to a general feeling of frustration toward the University. As well as contributing to a sense that the University does not know what it is doing - that we are the guinea pigs. The easiest solution to this is that changes only apply to new students. Whatever you enrol under is what you finish under. Then the University can continue to improve the service without frustrating the students.”

HDR candidate

The majority of the postgraduates reported a very positive experience with supervision but were critical of the administration of the new PhD program, which was described as disorganised and of poor quality, governed by policies that were punitive and poorly communicated. This left postgraduates feeling that the decisions made by the university about their PhD programs were not in their interests.

“...students seem to feel that they are being placed in an adversarial relationship with MIGR, instead of feeling supported.”

HDR candidate

Although the policy changes have been implemented by the university in a genuine effort to reduce completion times and improve the PhD experience, the inability to show some flexibility, take into account the particular circumstances of a situation and make a sensible decision (even if it is outside the policy) has created an environment that is seen by postgraduates as punitive rather than supportive.

The MPA requests that the Graduate Research Committee consider the recommendations in this paper and review their decisions in light of feedback from the postgraduate community.

Summary of MPA recommendations

Recommendation 1: That all research postgraduates have their candidatures governed by the conditions in place at the time of enrolment.

Recommendation 2: That the mid-candidature review and pre-submission (final) review revert to being milestones instead of hurdles.

Recommendation 3: That ‘lack of supervision’ be accepted as a bone fide reason in support of an application for an extension to a milestone.

Recommendation 4: That serious sickness be accepted as a bone fide reason in support of an application for an extension to a milestone.

Recommendation 5: That for HDRs enrolled through the Malaysia campus only, employment be accepted as a bona fide reason in support of an application for an extension to a milestone.

Recommendation 6: That applications for extensions to milestones are decided on a case-by-case basis, with all matters beyond the student’s control taken into consideration.

Recommendation 7: That applications for sick leave and intermission are able to be backdated for up to three weeks.

Recommendation 8: That extensions to candidature be granted where students have the support of their supervisors, reasonable progress can be demonstrated and an estimated completion date is submitted.

Recommendation 9: That candidature extensions be of an appropriate length to reflect the estimated completion date.

Recommendation 10: That there should not be a minimum period of reenrolment applied to postgraduates who are returning after having been discontinued in good standing.

Recommendation 11: That where postgraduates are required to reenrol for three months to submit an already completed thesis, no Student Services Amenities Fee (SSAF) be applied. *This recommendation to be actioned by the MPA and University Chief Operating Office.*

Recommendation 12: That faculties review all coursework units in relation to their relevance to research programs and benefit to HDR candidates.

Recommendation 13: That candidature be automatically extended to accommodate the length of time lost to compulsory coursework units.

Recommendation 14: That faculties and MIGR review all training skills units on offer to ensure quality and relevance.

Recommendation 15: That MIGR review the offer of a PhD model that requires the compulsory inclusion of 120 hours of training skills.

Attachment A:

Summary of retrospective application of MIGR policy changes

Summary of retrospective application of MIGR policy changes	
Policy in place at time of enrolment	After new policy implementation
1 hurdle (confirmation) and 2 milestones	All 3 milestones are hurdles
Extensions to milestones Confirmation at 12 months. Mid-candidature review between 21-27 months Pre-submission seminar no later than 6 months prior to the candidature end date. Some flexibility allowed around dates for mid-candidature and pre-submission seminars.	<i>Pre -2015 enrolment students:</i> 12 weeks extension available for confirmation only. If confirmation not passed, an additional 12 weeks can be granted by MIGR. No extensions available for remaining two hurdles. <i>Post-2015 enrolment students:</i> 12 weeks extension available for each of the 3 hurdles (a total of 36 weeks extension).
Acceptable reasons for extensions: Equipment breakdown, Ethics delay, Change of supervisor, Change of project, Lack of supervision, Sickness, Financial hardship – anything that negatively affected the student’s progress was taken into consideration.	Acceptable reasons for extensions: Reasons beyond the student’s control eg Equipment breakdown Ethics delay Specifically not sickness, lack of supervision and employment
Prior to 2014, intermission and sick leave applications can be backdated	Intermission and sick leave applications cannot be backdated (changed in 2014).
Supervisor on panel with voting rights. Supervisor present when panel interviews student.	Supervisor can’t be on panel and has no voting rights. Panel must interview and consult with supervisor. Supervisor must not be present when panel interviews student.
Unsatisfactory confirmation – specified period to comply with panel requests – if not achieved, appeal process – if unsuccessful, terminated.	Unsatisfactory confirmation – specified period to comply with panel requests – if not achieved, terminated.
Unsatisfactory mid-candidature or pre-submission seminar – not seen as termination points. Termination took place at non-confirmation or any other time throughout candidature as appropriate via termination procedures.	Unsatisfactory mid-candidature or pre-submission seminar – specified period to comply with panel requests – if not achieved, terminated.
Three week grace period at the end of candidature (can be used to submit thesis).	No grace period at the end of candidature.

Summary of retrospective application of MIGR policy changes	
Policy in place at time of enrolment	After new policy implementation
End of candidature application for extension – approved if research has been delayed by circumstances beyond the student’s control. Illness specifically accepted as a bona fide reason for extension.	End of candidature application for extension – approved only if there are exceptional circumstances and the student can provide a strong and compelling argument. Illness and employment specifically not accepted as bona fide reasons for extension.
End of candidature extension approved for a maximum of six months (single extension application).	End of candidature extension approved for a maximum of three months at a time. Can apply twice for a total of 6 months.
Can apply for lapsed candidature status at the end of 4.5 year candidature.	Will be discontinued in good standing when all extension options have been exhausted.
No enrolment required for lapsed candidate to submit completed thesis for examination.	Three months minimum enrolment for discontinued candidate to submit completed thesis for examination.
Cannot reenrol within 4 years of candidature having lapsed.	No minimum time imposed for reenroling after discontinuation of candidature.
From 2013, compulsory training and coursework components begin to be progressively introduced to all PhD programs. The equivalent of three months coursework and/or training is required. Some faculties introduce this change in 2013, some in 2014 and the remaining faculties plan for 2015.	Faculties/schools determine which of three doctoral programs they will introduce in 2015 to supercede the 2013 model: Graduate Research Professional Development (GRPD) - 40 hours faculty provided training/coursework plus 80 hours MIGR provided training. Coursework - Coursework requirements set by faculty. Graduate Research Interdisciplinary Programs (GRIPs) - Customised professional development program devised by participating faculties.
For some HDRs, no compulsory coursework units.	Compulsory coursework units introduced. Units can be attempted a maximum of twice – if fail or do not achieve minimum required grade, candidature terminated.
For some HDRs. training inclusive of internal (faculty and MIGR) and external providers (eg industry-run events/international conferences).	Training provided by internal providers only (faculty and MIGR).