AUSTRALIAN POSTGRADUATE AWARDS (APA)
CONDITIONS OF AWARD

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Australian Commonwealth Government Department of Education in conjunction with Australian higher education institutions operates a postgraduate award scheme, known as Australian Postgraduate Awards (APA), to support persons of exceptional research promise to undertake a higher degree by research.

1.2 APAs offered at Australian Catholic University may be taken up at any of the University’s six campuses. Awards are available to conduct research in any area of study in which postgraduate supervision is available.

1.3 APAs are administered by Graduate Research on behalf of the University Research Committee (URC).

2. ELIGIBILITY

2.1 Academic Requirements

To be eligible for a new APA, an applicant must meet all of the following requirements:

(a) have completed at least four years of tertiary education study at a high level of achievement. For example, a:
   • four-year degree;
   • three-year degree and an honours year;
   • three-year degree and one year of a higher degree;
   • three-year degree and one year of a masters preliminary or other qualifying programme; or
   • three-year degree and a postgraduate diploma;

(b) have obtained first class honours or equivalent results;

(c) be undertaking a higher degree at ACU;

(d) be enrolled as a full-time student upon commencement of their award or, in exceptional circumstances, be granted approval by the institution for a part-time award in line with the criteria detailed in Section 3.2; and

(e) have their enrolment in the proposed higher degree programme accepted by ACU before being ranked for an offer of an APA. It is not acceptable for an institution to make an offer to a student who then has to find a place in a faculty or department and an appropriate supervisor.

Applicants are ineligible for an APA if they:

(a) hold an Australian doctoral-by-research degree or equivalent, or hold an Australian master-by-research degree or equivalent if seeking an APA to undertake a master-by-research programme;

(b) have held an APA, an APA (Industry) or an Australian Government-funded Postgraduate Research Award (excluding an International Postgraduate
Research Scholarship–IPRS) unless it was terminated within six months of the commencement of benefits; or

(c) are currently receiving another equivalent award, scholarship or salary to undertake the research higher degree, providing benefit greater than 75% of the base APA stipend rate.

2.2 Citizenship Requirements

To be eligible for an APA, an applicant must be an Australian Citizen, a New Zealand citizen or an Australian Permanent Resident at the closing date of applications.

2.3 Selection Process

The University is required to select eligible applications on the basis of academic merit. Institutions may take into account their particular areas of research strength and any strategic directions outlined in their approved Research Strategic Plan when ranking individual applicants.

When considering first class honours equivalence (2.1(b) above), the University may:

(a) select applicants presenting other qualifications and/or highly relevant work experience as equating to first class honours, provided the APA Guidelines are followed and justification for the rating is provided;

(b) assess other qualifications as equating to a first class honours degree, including advanced postgraduate diplomas, master-by-coursework and research, and some masters qualifying programmes;

(c) take into account research publications; and

(d) in exceptional circumstances, consider a second class honours (2A), plus publications and/or relevant work experience, to be equivalent to first class honours, provided this is verified and approved by the institution’s ranking committee.

Institutions may grant priority to applicants from designated equity groups when allocating their awards.

There are no age restrictions relating to an APA with stipend.

2.4 Offer of an Award

When institutions offer an award to a successful applicant, they are required to advise the potential APA holder of the conditions and benefits to which they are entitled, and the rules and responsibilities that come with the award.

Institutions may offer an award at any time of the year subject to their commencement procedures.
2.5 Eligibility for Part-Time Awards

The University may approve a part-time APA for a student only if:

(a) the student has exceptional circumstances: or

(b) the student is undertaking Commercialisation Training Scheme (CTS) training as specified in Chapter 8 of the Other Grants Guidelines concurrently with the HDR.

The University must be satisfied that the exceptional circumstances relate to significant caring commitments or a medical condition which limits the student’s capacity to undertake full-time study.

A student who has a part-time APA may revert to full-time study at any time with the permission of the University.

Part-time awards are not available to applicants seeking to undertake paid employment on a full-time or on a substantial part-time basis.

Note: Substantial part-time work is regarded as being more than the institution would permit its full-time award holders to undertake without interfering with their study programmes. At ACU, this is normally eight hours per week.

3. TENURE

3.1 Full-Time Awards

3.1.1 A full-time APA with stipend may be held for three years for research doctoral degree (e.g. PhD or EdD) studies or for two years for master-by-research (MPhil, MEdR, MHSci and MThR) degree studies.

3.1.2 Periods of study already undertaken towards the degree prior to the commencement of the award or undertaken during suspension of the award, or undertaken during the tenure of a previous Australian postgraduate course award, will be deducted from the maximum period of tenure.

3.2 Part-Time Awards

3.2.1 In approving a part-time award, the University must be satisfied that the award holder’s circumstances are such that it would not be reasonable to expect a student to study on a full-time basis.

3.2.2 The tenure for part-time awards is six years for research doctoral degree programmes and four years for master-by-research degree programmes.

3.2.3 Part-time awards are not available to applicants seeking to undertake paid employment on a full-time, or on a substantial part-time basis, and recipients are subject to the same restrictions on employment as full-time APA holders.
3.2.4 A part-time award holder is expected to progress at half the rate of a full-time award holder and extensions are possible for doctoral candidates. (No extensions are possible for part-time master-by-research candidates.)

3.2.5 Award holders approved to study part-time may revert to full-time study at any time with the permission of the University.

3.2.6 Stipends for part-time awards are not tax exempt. The part-time rate is adjusted for taxation so that part-time award holders receive half the amount paid to full-time award holders.

3.2.7 The University must inform the Department of Education in the Annual Report of any approvals for part-time APA students.

3.3 Extension of an Award

3.3.1 A doctoral candidate may apply for a maximum extension of up to six months subject to satisfactory progress, provided the grounds for extension are related to study and are beyond the control of the candidate.

3.3.2 No extensions are possible for master-by-research candidates.

3.4 Changing between Master-by-Research and Doctoral Studies

The RTSC may approve, on the recommendation of the Dean, conversion of an APA with stipend for master-by-research degree study to an APA with stipend leading to a research doctorate. Similarly, an award for doctoral studies can be converted to a master-by-research award. The maximum award duration of a converted scholarship becomes that for the new degree.

3.5 Completion of a Master-by-Research

3.5.1 An APA with stipend holder completing a master-by-research degree may continue the award for doctoral research studies provided that there is no interval between master-by-research and doctoral candidature, or that such an interval is covered by suspension of the award.

3.5.2 Because an award normally expires on completion of a programme, the candidate should ensure that the progression to a research doctorate or suspension of the award is arranged before the master-by-research studies are completed.

Note: The maximum period of an APA for a candidate progressing from master-by-research to doctoral research candidature is three years (or three and a half years if an extension is approved) from the date the student took up the award as a master-by-research candidate.

The candidate may undertake the doctorate at a different institution from the master-by-research degree, provided the transfer of the APA is arranged between the institutions before the master-by-research studies are completed.
3.6 Suspension of an APA

3.6.1 APA holders may apply to their institution for a suspension of their award for up to 12 months. The approval of suspensions is at the discretion of the University.

3.6.2 In exceptional cases, candidates may apply for suspensions beyond 12 months, although institutions may set limits on any suspensions beyond 12 months. Any suspensions beyond 12 months must be approved by the institution’s scholarships committee or equivalent, subject to it being satisfied that the exceptional circumstances are beyond the student’s control and warrant a further suspension of the APA.

3.6.3 Periods of study undertaken towards the degree during suspension of the APA must be deducted from the maximum period of its tenure.

3.7 Eligibility for concurrent awards, scholarships or salaries

APA holders may receive a concurrent award, scholarship or salary to undertake their research higher degree if:

(a) the concurrent award, scholarship or salary provides a benefit of less than 75% of the base APA stipend rate; or

(b) the APA is suspended for the period of concurrent award, scholarship or salary and the period of study undertaken towards the research higher degree during suspension of the APA is deducted from the maximum period of its tenure.

Income earned from sources unrelated to the course of study is not subject to the 75% rule.

4. STIPENDS AND ALLOWANCES

Where a full-time APA student is not enrolled over the full period of the year, because of a late commencement or periods of suspension, the institution must provide at least the proportion of the annual stipend for the period in which study is undertaken for that year.

4.1 Annual Stipends and Outside Work

4.1.1 APA stipend rates are indexed each year in accordance with the Higher Education Operating Grant Index.

4.1.2 APA holders are permitted to:

(a) obtain funds for fieldwork, equipment or other expenses not covered by the award;

(b) obtain funding for overseas travel costs from other Australian Government awards or any other source; and

(c) receive income derived from part-time work undertaken within the guidelines set by institutions.
4.2 Living Allowance

An APA in 2015 carries a pro-rata living allowance at the base rate of $25,849 (tax exempt) per annum for both full-time doctoral and research Master’s awardees. Stipends to individual scholars will not be reduced during the tenure of the award.

4.3 Relocation Allowance

4.3.1 For candidates relocating between Australian cities to take up their award or in the case of students undertaking approved transfer of their APA requiring a relocation of their place of residence, the following payments will be made upon presentation of original receipts:

(a) travel expenses within Australia, up to a maximum amount equivalent to the economy class or student airfare for the APA holder, spouse and any dependants to the new city; or

(b) travel by car, for which they will receive a per kilometre allowance as determined by the institution up to the equivalent airfare costs. Students cannot claim for accommodation or meal costs if they elect to travel by car; and

(c) removal expenses up to the approved maximum amounts (amount to be confirmed by University).

Note: The relocation allowance applies only to the taking up of an award.

4.3.2 For the purposes of relocation entitlements, a dependant is defined as a person who moves residence with the APA student. A ‘spouse’ is defined as another person who is married to or in a de facto relationship with the APA holder where the two live together and have a mutual commitment to each other to the exclusion of all others.

4.3.3 A spouse who transfers employment to the city of the University may be regarded as a dependant; a child continuing to study in the former city and not intending to live on a permanent basis with the APA student at the new location, cannot be regarded as a dependant.

4.3.4 The University can only process claims for reimbursement of relocation costs and thesis allowances within the year the claim is made.

4.5 Thesis Allowance

4.5.1 An allowance, to be determined by the University early in 2014, will be paid upon presentation of original receipts to the Manager, Graduate Research, Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor Research.

4.5.2 The thesis allowance must be claimed within one year of the submission of the thesis for an examination.

4.5.3 The amount paid will be up to the maximum rate applicable at the time of submission of the thesis.
4.5.4 The allowance is a contribution to the costs of production of the thesis (i.e. typing support, photocopying, and binding) and does not include costs such as purchase of computer equipment.

4.5.5 The thesis allowance is payable for costs associated with resubmission of a thesis, or the lodgement of bound copies of the thesis following approval, provided that the claim is made within one year of the resubmission date or lodgement date. The combined total of allowances for submission and resubmission must not exceed the approved maximum amount.

4.5.6 In exceptional circumstances, students may apply to their institution for a waiver of the relevant time limit on claiming the thesis allowance with any decision remaining at the discretion of the institution. Any waiver of the time limit must be approved by the institution’s Scholarships Committee or equivalent, subject to it being satisfied that the exceptional circumstances were beyond the candidate’s control and warrant an extension of the period in which a thesis allowance may be claimed.

4.5.7 The award of an APA does not cover annual student services charges. Candidates are responsible for paying such charges themselves.

4.6 Allowance Claims

Institutions will make reimbursement payments to APA students on provision of full particulars of mode and time of travel and receipts for all other payments. Students should receive full reimbursement for the eligible claims they make, up to the approved maximum amount. This includes reimbursement for any GST amounts specified in the receipts provided.

5. HECS EXEMPTION

5.1 Allocation of RTS places to APA recipients

All students who are awarded an APA for 2014 and do not already hold a HECS-exempt place, must be given priority when institutions allocate places under the Research Training Scheme (RTS). This ensures that, where possible, APA holders will be granted a HECS exemption for the tenure of their award.

Where an institution is unable to support an APA recipient under the RTS due to insufficient places being available, or where an APA recipient does not qualify for an RTS place, the APA holder may be enrolled in a fee-paying place for which it would be expected that the tuition fees would be waived by the institution.

5.2 Expiration of HECS Exemption

Where an APA holder’s entitlement to a HECS exempt place under the RTS expires prior to the tenure of their APA, the APA holder may continue the award as a fee-paying student. It would be expected that the institution would waive the tuition fees for the APA holder.
6. LEAVE ARRANGEMENTS

The institution may grant an APA holder the following leave entitlements:

6.1 Recreation Leave
   6.1.1 APA holders will receive up to 20 days paid recreation leave each year of the award calculated on a pro-rata basis within the period of the award.
   
   6.1.2 Recreation leave may be accrued but must be taken during the tenure of the award. Payment in lieu of taking annual recreation leave is not permitted.
   
   6.1.3 APA holders will forfeit any unused leave remaining when an award is terminated or completed.

6.2 Sick Leave
   6.2.1 APA holders may receive up to 10 days sick leave each year of the award and this may be accrued over the tenure of the award.
   
   6.2.2 APA holders may also receive additional paid sick leave of up to a total of 12 weeks during their award for medically substantiated periods of illness lasting longer than 10 days. Where an APA holder takes a period of additional sick leave, the tenure of the APA will be extended by that period.
   
   6.2.3 Sick leave entitlements may also be extended to cover APA holders with family responsibilities caring for sick children or relatives, subject to the usual practice of the institution in relation to students on similar awards.

6.3 Maternity Leave
   6.3.1 Once APA holders have completed 12 months of their award, they are entitled to a maximum of 12 weeks paid maternity leave during the tenure of the award.
   
   6.3.2 Periods of paid maternity leave are in addition to the normal duration of the APA.
   
   6.3.3 APA holders who have not completed 12 months of their award may access unpaid maternity leave through the suspension provisions.

6.4 Parenting Leave
   6.4.1 APA holders, who are partners of women giving birth and who have completed 12 months of their award, may be entitled to a period of paid parenting leave at the time of the birth, subject to the usual practice of the institution in relation to students on similar awards.
6.4.2 Periods of paid parenting leave are in addition to the normal duration of the APA.

6.4.3 APA holders who have not completed 12 months of their award may access unpaid parenting leave through the suspension provisions.

7. **ACADEMIC PROGRESS**

APA holders must submit regular progress reports as and when required by the institution. The institution is required to terminate the awards of candidates who fail to maintain satisfactory academic progress.

8. **TRANSFER OF AN AWARD BETWEEN INSTITUTIONS**

8.1 APAs are allocated to institutions based on their research performance and any request by a student to transfer an award requires the support of both their home institution and the new institution.

8.2 An award can only be taken up at the institution at which the application was lodged and students are expected to complete their candidature at that institution.

8.3 The decision to grant a transfer is at the discretion of either or both the home institution and the new institution.

8.4 Transfers will normally be approved only if there are exceptional circumstances relating to the request, such as the student's supervisor leaving the institution and no suitable replacement supervisor is available.

8.5 Transfer arrangements must be agreed between institutions, subject to the APA holder being offered a research place at the new institution. (The Manager, Graduate Research will liaise with the relevant Officer(s) at the new institution and in the Department of Education on all requests to transfer an award.)

8.6 For students who commenced their APA from 2002 onwards, the new institution must be able to support any such transferring students from within its allocated funding for the APA Scheme and no additional funding will be provided.

8.7 Transfer arrangements for 2002-onwards students are subject to the new institution agreeing to support the student from within its allocated APA funding. APA funds are not transferable between institutions for 2002-onwards students.

8.8 The transfer of an APA does not constitute sufficient grounds for a subsequent extension of the award.

9. **EMPLOYMENT: PART-TIME WORK**

9.1 APA holders are permitted to:

(a) obtain funds for fieldwork, equipment or other expenses not covered by the award;

(b) obtain funding for overseas travel costs from other Australian Government
awards or any other source; and
(c) receive income derived from part-time work undertaken within the guidelines set by the University. (See Section 9.2 below)

9.2 APA holders may undertake a strictly limited amount of part-time work subject to conditions determined by the University. Part-time work shall not exceed an average of eight hours in a working week, which is defined as the period between the hours of 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday.

9.3 Such part-time employment must not interfere with an award holder’s research programme or academic progress.

9.4 Holders of a part-time award are subject to the same restriction on employment as full-time award holders.

10. RESEARCH SPECIFIC CONDITIONS

10.1 Social Science Data Sets:
Any machine-readable data arising from a project involving research relating to the social sciences should be lodged with the Australian Consortium for Social and Political Research Inc. (ACSPRI) or any other appropriate archive for secondary use by other investigators. This should normally be within two years of the conclusion of any fieldwork relating to the project research. (This requirement may be subject to any Codes of Conduct in place at the time.) If a student is not intending to do so within the two year period they should include the reasons why in their final report.

10.2 Research involving Humans or Animals:
If any project involves research with human participants or animals, the student must comply with the appropriate Codes of Conduct adopted for these purposes by the National Health and Medical Research Council. Work on the project may not commence without the appropriate clearance of the University’s Ethics or Bio-safety Committee (or equivalent) and from any other relevant authority outside the University (for example: State Departments of Education).

10.3 Deposition of Biological Materials:
Any biological material accumulated during the course of a project shall be transferred to an Australian body with statutory responsibility for control of such material. If no such body is available to take control of the biological material then the University shall dispose of the material in accordance with its established safeguards.

10.4 Genetic Manipulation:
If a project involves the preparation and/or use of recombinant nucleic acids constructed in vitro from sources that do not ordinarily recombine genetic information, approval in writing by the University’s Bio-safety Committee (or equivalent) or the Genetic Manipulation Advisory Committee (GMAC), must be obtained before work on the project commences.
10.5 Ionising Radiation:
If a project involves the use of ionizing radiation, the University is required to ensure that personnel performing procedures involving ionising radiation are appropriately trained and hold a relevant current license from the appropriate State authority. The University shall retain all such licenses and is required to provide them to the Department of Education if required to do so.

10.6 Importation of Experimental Organisms
The University must ensure that before experimental organisms are imported into Australia for the purposes of the student’s project, agreement in principle for the importation must be obtained from the appropriate Commonwealth and State authorities.

11. POSTGRADUATE STUDENT OBLIGATIONS

11.1 All postgraduate students are obliged to be familiar with and abide by relevant State and Commonwealth Privacy Legislation. Section 14 of the Commonwealth Privacy Act 1998 contains the Information Privacy Principles.

11.2 All postgraduate students are also obliged to be familiar with and abide by:
(a) the University Regulations governing their candidature;
(b) the University’s Code of Conduct of Research;
(c) the University’s Intellectual Property Policy;
(d) the National Health and Medical Research Council codes on human and animal experimentation;
(e) the Australian Government’s Recombinant DNA Monitoring Committee guidelines for research; and
(f) Commonwealth and State regulations and guidelines governing research involving ionizing radiation, and access to and handling of hazardous or restricted substances.

Newly enrolling candidates must apply for the relevant ethics/safety approval as soon as they have developed their research proposal (including: research design, methodology and research instrument).

Currently enrolled candidates accepting an Award must provide a copy of the approval from the Research Projects Ethics Committee and a copy of the annual renewal if the approval was granted more than 12 months previously.

11.3 Candidates should also be fully aware of their obligations regarding contact with their supervisors, and the need to submit written material and academic progress reports as and when required. They shall also be diligent in pursuing their research and in completing their candidature as soon as possible.
12. **TERMINATION OF AN AWARD**

12.1 An institution must terminate an APA:

(a) if, in the opinion of the institution, the course of study is not being carried out with competence and diligence or in accordance with the offer of the APA, and no suitable alternative arrangements can be made for continuation of the postgraduate degree;

(b) if, an institution determines that a student is guilty of serious academic misconduct;

(c) when the candidate ceases to be a full-time candidate and when approval has not been obtained to hold the APA on a part-time basis;

(d) on completion of the course, or the death, incapacity, resignation or withdrawal of the candidate;

(e) the award holder does not resume study at the conclusion of a period of suspension, or does not make arrangements to extend that period of suspension;

(f) if the award holder fails to maintain satisfactory academic progress; and/or

(g) if the APA holder accepts another equivalent award, scholarship or salary to undertake their research higher degree providing a greater than 75% of the base APA stipend rate and the APA holder does not comply with the requirements of Section 3.7 above.

12.2 If an APA is terminated, it cannot be reactivated unless the termination occurred in error. The Department of Education must be advised of all terminations in the Annual Report.

13. **APPEAL PROCEDURES**

13.1 Students may appeal to the University Research Training Standing Committee (RTSC) for the resolution of any disputes that may arise concerning the award.

13.2 Appeals will only be heard on claims of procedural deficiencies in the assessment process.