



Australian Government  
Department of Education,  
Skills and Employment

# Growing industry internships for research PhD students through the Research Training Program

Implementation paper

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## Purpose of this consultation paper

The 2021-22 Federal Budget announced that the Australian Government will provide a financial incentive for universities to enrol research PhD students in industry internships.

The new measure will strengthen the architecture of research block grants (RBGs) and the incentives already in place for university and industry collaboration. The Research Training Program (RTP) will be refocused to reward universities for research PhD<sup>1</sup> students that graduate having undertaken a three-month industry internship, commencing within the first 18 months of enrolment.

The current collection of higher degree by research (HDR) end-user engagement data through the Tertiary Collection of Student Information (TCSI) System will be revised to implement the Budget measure.

This revision will provide the opportunity to streamline and provide greater clarity for reporting HDR end-user engagement data, taking into account feedback provided to the Department by the HDR End-User Engagement Working Group (Working Group). The Working Group was established to identify ways to improve the collection of HDR end-user engagement data and was comprised of representatives from seven universities.

The change to the RTP weighting, both fixed and proposed internship eligibility requirements, as well as key revisions to HDR end-user engagement data reporting, are outlined in this paper.

## How to make a submission

The Department of Education, Skills and Employment (Department) is seeking views on final implementation arrangements for internships that are eligible for the new RTP weighting and associated changes to TCSI. To make a submission, including responses to a series of questions via a Qualtrics survey, please follow this [link](#). For reference, the questions are provided at [Appendix A](#).

**Submissions are due by Friday 6 August 2021.** Late submissions will not be accepted without prior written approval.

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<sup>1</sup> A research PhD is defined as a Research Doctorate in accordance with the *Commonwealth Scholarships Guidelines (Research) 2017*

## Overview

### Current RTP formula

Research Training Program (RTP) funding is currently allocated based on the relative performance of universities in earning research income and generating HDR completions. A university's RTP allocation is based on its share of each data type for the two most recent years of data available relative to other universities, with each funding driver making up a proportion of the overall RTP allocations.

RTP funding is allocated based on three funding drivers (see Figure 1):

1. Competitive income – 25% of RTP allocations.
2. Engagement income – 25% of RTP allocations.
3. Weighted HDR student completions – 50% of RTP allocations.

**Figure 1: RTP funding drivers**



Within the HDR student completions sub-pool, completions are weighted according to each student's Indigenous or non-Indigenous identification, the level of the HDR (Masters or PhD), and the cost type of the HDR. A university's weighted HDR student completions is calculated to work out its share of the funding pool. Weighted HDR student completions are equal to the sum of the number of completions for each student type multiplied by the HDR cost type as specified in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Current RTP weightings<sup>2</sup>**

Degree completion type	Non-Indigenous student	Indigenous student
High-cost Research Doctorate	4.7	9.4
Low-cost Research Doctorate	2.0	4.0
High-cost Research Masters	2.35	4.7
Low-cost Research Masters	1.0	2.0

<sup>2</sup> High cost degrees include science, engineering, medical studies, pharmacy, dentistry, veterinary studies, human movement, and psychology. Low cost degrees consist of all other fields.

## A new RTP weighting to grow industry internships for research PhD students

The RTP will be refocused to reward universities for research PhD students that graduate having undertaken a three-month industry internship, commencing within the first 18 months of enrolment.

This change recognises that the number of research PhD graduates has grown significantly over the last decade and opportunities to gain employment in academia are limited. Refocusing the RTP to incentivise growth in longer-term internships for research PhD students early in their HDR will help build new employment pathways beyond academic roles.

Industry will benefit from more opportunities to host research PhD students, which will bolster their ability to harness ideas and concepts for innovation, and encourage the recruitment of high-calibre PhD graduates.

### The redesigned RTP formula

A new weighting of 2.0 within the HDR student completions sub-pool will apply to research PhD students who graduate having completed an eligible industry internship, outlined in Table 2. Research Masters weightings remain unchanged.

**Table 2: New RTP weightings with research PhD industry internship weighting**

Degree completion type	Non-Indigenous student	Indigenous student
High-cost Research Doctorate, no internship	4.7	9.4
Low-cost Research Doctorate, no internship	2.0	4.0
High-cost Research Doctorate with internship*	6.7	11.4
Low-cost Research Doctorate with internship*	4.0	6.0
High-cost Research Masters	2.35	4.7
Low-cost Research Masters	1.0	2.0

\*Includes additional 2.0 weighting.



## Internships that will attract additional RTP funding

The intent of the new RTP weighting is to incentivise university and industry collaboration, and to build new employment pathways for research PhD students. This will be achieved through rewarding internships that commence early in a research PhD student's degree and are of a duration that enable students to build strong industry-relevant capabilities and professional networks.<sup>3,4</sup> Early engagement with industry will enable PhD students' research to be shaped by current and future industry needs.

To attract the new RTP weighting, an eligible industry internship will be an internship with a 'research end-user' (refer to [Appendix B](#) for definition) that:

1. commenced within 18 months of a student's enrolment in a research PhD, and
2. consisted of three-months equating to a minimum of 60 full-time equivalent (FTE) days of engagement (refer to [Appendix B](#) for a definition of 'Days of engagement with a research end-user').

## Achieving 60 FTE days of engagement with a research end-user

To achieve the policy objectives of the new RTP weighting within the above eligibility criteria, there are options for how a minimum of 60 FTE days of engagement can be achieved.

The Department is seeking sector feedback on whether an eligible industry internship should be completed through one intensive block, or whether more flexible structures could be eligible, including those constructed on a part-time basis.

Under the flexible model approach, the Department is particularly seeking views on how universities would structure an internship to maximise the benefits to students and research end-users in line with the policy intent of the RTP change. This includes what universities consider the optimal format of attendance to be, for example, on a regular weekly basis or through more diffused blocks of engagement.

The opportunity to respond with detail is provided through the survey link on page four.

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<sup>3</sup> F Valencia-Forrester, 'Internships and the PhD: Is this the future direction of work-integrated learning in Australia?', *International Journal of Work - Integrated Learning*, 2019, 20(4): 389-400.

<sup>4</sup> TG Garza and HM Jones, [The Impact of the Internship Experience on Returning Doctoral Students \[PDF 1732 KB\]](#), University of Sheffield Careers Service, 2017.

## Redesigning the collection of HDR end-user engagement data

To collect data required to identify research PhD industry internships that commenced within 18 months of enrolment and consisted of at least 60 FTE days of engagement, changes are required to the reporting of HDR end-user engagement through TCSI. This provides the opportunity to streamline and clarify reporting requirements to address feedback provided by the Working Group.

It should be noted that the Department will continue to collect data on all internships undertaken by a HDR student. However, only those that meet the specified eligibility criteria will attract an additional RTP weighting.

These changes will take effect for reporting 2022 HDR end-user engagement data, to enable the new RTP weighting to be partially reflected in 2024 RTP funding allocations, and fully reflected in 2025 allocations.

### Current TCSI HDR end-user engagement element

In 2018, the Department introduced a new indicator to its student data collection, [Element 593](#) (E593) 'Higher degree by research end-user engagement'. Currently [E593](#) collects data on HDR end-user engagement biannually throughout a student's HDR, through the five categories listed in Table 3.

**Table 3: Current E593 HDR end-user engagement reporting categories**

VALUE	MEANING
02	Undertaking research internship with a research end-user
03	Jointly supervised by a research end-user
04	Jointly funded or fully funded by a research end-user
05	Undertaking formal training on end-user engagement
06	Undertaking other commercialisation and engagement activities

### Proposed TCSI changes

The following TCSI elements relate to the reporting of HDR end-user engagement. Each of these elements will enable the collection of a piece of data necessary to determine eligibility for the new RTP weighting.

Some elements require amendment in order to collect the data, while others will remain unchanged, as detailed below.



## Reducing the number of HDR end-user engagement reporting categories

The Working Group suggested that the number of categories of HDR end-user engagement contributed to administrative and reporting burden for staff and students.

In recognition of this feedback, it is proposed to reduce the current five categories of data currently collected by [E593](#) (refer Table 3) to two, as outlined in Table 4.

**Table 4: Proposed E593 HDR end-user engagement reporting categories**

VALUE	MEANING
02	Undertaking research internship with a research end-user
03	Jointly supervised by a research end-user

**Category 02** ‘Undertaking research internship with a research end-user’ will capture data that will be used to apply the new RTP weighting, as well as to provide the Department with information on HDR end-user engagement through internships to inform future policy review and development.

**Category 03** ‘Jointly supervised by a research-end user’ will continue to collect valuable sector-wide data to indicate the level of engagement between universities and research end-users co-supervising HDR students.

The revised TCSI [Element 593](#) will continue to use the same definitions of ‘[Research end-user](#)’ and ‘[Jointly supervised by a research end-user](#)’ (refer [Appendix B](#)).

The Department proposes to amend the definition of ‘[Research internship](#)’ to remove the specification of a minimum duration (refer [Appendix B](#)), noting the eligibility criteria for additional RTP funding. This will enable the Department to collect more comprehensive data regarding the length of HDR internships to inform future policy processes.

## Commencement and conclusion dates

[Element 609](#) ‘HDR end-user engagement effective from date’ and [Element 610](#) ‘HDR end-user engagement effective to date’ will continue to collect start and end dates of HDR end-user engagement. This will capture whether an internship commenced within 18 months of a research PhD student’s enrolment, an eligibility requirement that must be met in order to attract the new RTP weighting.



## Days of engagement with a research end-user

A new TCSI element ‘Days of engagement with a research end-user’ will be created to enable universities to report the number of FTE days a HDR student attended an internship with a research end-user. This will enable the Department to determine if an internship satisfies the 60 FTE days of engagement minimum requirement necessary to attract the new RTP weighting.

A definition of ‘Days of engagement with a research end-user’ will clarify that a student can attend an internship on weekdays and non-business days (weekends or public holidays), and that their attendance must be reported as FTE days (refer [Appendix B](#)).

## Once-only reporting

To streamline reporting requirements as recommended by the Working Group, the collection of HDR end-user engagement data will no longer occur biannually for enrolled HDR students. Instead, universities will only be required to report a HDR student’s end-user engagement activity once, upon completion of their HDR.

## Verification materials

In accordance with TCSI reporting requirements, universities must report accurate student information to the Department.<sup>5</sup> Universities need to be positioned to verify this information if requested. To ensure this, universities should collect and store information related to the HDR end-user engagement they are reporting to TCSI. Information collected could include the research end-user’s name, ABN, and details of a relevant contact/s within the organisation.

## Supporting materials

In response to feedback from the Working Group on reported student confusion and administrative difficulties around HDR end-user engagement data collection, the Department proposes to develop supporting materials for the changed reporting requirements. This could include good practice guides and frequently asked questions for students and university administrators. These materials would aim to help increase the consistency and reliability of data reported and reduce the workload for university staff in responding to queries from students.

In addition to feedback provided to this paper, sector consultation will play an important role in informing the development of future support products.

## Legislative amendment

Legislative amendments to the [Commonwealth Scholarship Guidelines \(Research\) 2017 \(Cth\)](#) will be required to adjust the current RTP weighting formula.

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<sup>5</sup> DESE Higher Education Administrative Information for Providers (March 2020) [Reporting Requirements](#), s 36.



## Appendix A

### Qualtrics survey questions

The Department is seeking responses to the following questions.

1. Within the eligibility criteria of an industry internship commencing within 18 months of a student's enrolment in a research PhD and consisting of three-months (a minimum of 60 full-time equivalent (FTE) days of engagement), what do you believe is the optimal structure of an internship? For example, one intensive block, a number of days per week on a regular basis, other part-time approaches. Provide supporting detail.
2. When will your university collect the changed HDR end-user engagement data, including days of engagement with a research end-user, and how do you propose to do so?
3. What level of change is required at your university to set up systems and procedures to report the revised data collection to the Department commencing in 2022?
  - Nil
  - Minor
  - Major
  - Unsure
4. What type of support materials could be developed to best ensure the collection of accurate and comprehensive data by universities? For example, good practice guidance for administrators and students, frequently asked questions, annual information sessions, other?
5. In relation to these supporting materials, what are the top three aspects of the new data collection that would need to be addressed?
6. What additional data on HDR end-user engagement, if any, should the Department collect to inform future Government or sector policy development? Provide reasons.
7. Are there any critical issues regarding implementation of the proposed changes that you would like to raise?

## Appendix B

### Existing TCSI definitions being maintained

<p><u>Research end-user</u></p>	<p>Research end-user is defined as an individual, community or organisation external to academia that will directly use or directly benefit from the output, outcome or results of the research.</p> <p>Examples of end users includes businesses, governments, non-governmental organisations, communities and community organisations. Specific exclusions of research end-user are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other higher education providers</li> <li>• Organisations that are affiliates, controlled entities or subsidiaries (such as Medical Research Institutes) of a higher education provider</li> <li>• Equivalents (international or domestic) of the above exclusions</li> </ul>
<p><u>Jointly supervised by a research end-user</u></p>	<p>Jointly supervised by a research end-user is defined as a HDR student that has at least two HDR supervisors, with at least one supervisor from a research end-user organisation. The supervision arrangements must be endorsed by the HDR student's HEP [Higher Education Provider] and the research end user supervisor must be actively engaged in the student's HDR.</p>

### TCSI definition being revised

<p><u>Research internship</u></p>	<p>Research internship is defined as a temporary position with a research end-user where a student has undertaken research and development (R&amp;D) related to their HDR. A research internship can be either paid or unpaid and can form part of the enrolment or be undertaken during a HDR period of suspension.</p>
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### New TCSI definition

<p><u>Days of engagement with a research end-user</u></p>	<p>The total number of full-time equivalent days that a HDR student engages with a research end-user. Days of engagement can include non-business days.</p>
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