

Higher Degree Research Admissions and Pathways Guideline

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1. Introduction

Entry to a Masters Degree (Research) or the Doctor of Philosophy program requires a Bachelor with Honours (or equivalent) qualification or a prior research degree. Entry to the Master of Philosophy requires a bachelor degree or an equivalent qualification. Entry to other programs such as Higher Doctorates or Professional Doctorates is detailed in the specific Conditions for Award for those programs.

Given that qualifications vary between disciplines and national and international institutions, qualifications are assessed for equivalence to UNSW qualifications by a formal UNSW application process that involves consultation between the School, Faculty and the Graduate Research School. Admission policy and procedures are outlined in the Admissions Policy and Admission to Higher Degree Research Programs Procedure.

1.1 Scope

This Guideline provides:

- information and guidance for potential higher degree research (HDR) candidates prior to submitting a formal application;
- information and guidance for supervisors prior to agreeing to supervise a candidate;
- clear and transparent admission criteria based on prior learning expectations for entry to research degrees at UNSW;
- information on alternative pathways into and between higher degree research (HDR) programs, including pathways to further study; and
- guidance on assessing equivalence to UNSW qualifications via assessment of prior learning.

2. Pre-admission actions

Prospective applicants should be interviewed by academic staff prior to them agreeing to be listed as a supervisor. Although face to face interviews are preferable, where this is not possible, interviews may be conducted via skype or other form of verbal communication. [Appendix B](#) outlines the broad pre-admission process.

2.1 Pre-admission interview principles

Sample interview questions are given in [Appendix C](#).

- (i) Contact with potential supervisor/s is an essential step for prospective HDR applicants to undertake before submitting an application.
- (ii) Supervisors should prepare for interviews by reviewing an applicant's written research proposal.
- (iii) Discussion and further development of the research proposal should occur between prospective applicants and proposed supervisors. The supervisor should be satisfied with the quality of the research proposal prior to confirming agreement to supervise.
- (iv) Supervisors should provide insight into the research conducted under their supervision and explain their own supervisory philosophy to prospective applicants.

2.2 Research Proposal

A research proposal or essay of an appropriate length should be provided. Each Faculty has specific guidelines for the content and length of the proposal.

2.2.1 Plagiarism

If a research proposal is submitted by a prospective applicant to UNSW for pre-admission evaluation, the applicant should be aware that UNSW may submit a copy of their proposal to a plagiarism checking service. If plagiarism is detected and confirmed in a research proposal, the application will not be considered.

2.3 Admission offers

- (i) Offer of a place in a program is not guaranteed on the basis of a supervisor agreeing to supervise an applicant.

- (ii) Admission offers are made by the Dean of Graduate Research as the UNSW officer responsible for admission and require satisfactory completion of and compliance with the UNSW application process.

3. Admission

Highly qualified HDR candidates conducting research in a supportive environment with high quality supervision are the key factors in successful HDR outcomes.

3.1 Admission principles

- (i) A high level of achievement by the applicant in coursework and research are demonstrated evidenced by formal academic qualifications and/or professional experience and discipline appropriate research outputs.
- (ii) Appropriate supervision, space and resources for the proposed HDR program are in place before an offer is made.
- (iii) Fair and equitable discipline informed assessment of whether prior learning is appropriate for the proposed HDR program is conducted.
- (iv) Timely and efficient administrative support for admission is provided.

4. Pathways into and between Research Degrees

There are two pathways into research degrees at UNSW.

- (i) **Entry as a new research candidate.** This pathway is for those applicants who have not previously studied in a research program at the same level for which they are applying. See [Appendix D](#) for the process.
- (ii) **Transfer from another program or institution.** This pathway is for those applicants or candidates who have in the past 3 years studied or are currently studying in a research program at the same level for which they are applying. See [Appendix E](#) for the process.

Note: Applicants who wish to study for a second research degree at the same level as previously awarded are considered on a case by case basis.

As a subset of (i) and (ii), applicants may apply on the basis of completion of standard qualifications or equivalent or may claim special circumstances as outlined in (iii) and (iv).

- (iii) **Standard qualification.** Equivalence to UNSW Bachelor with Honours or Masters Degree (Research) (MRes) qualifications needs to be demonstrated on the basis of discipline expectations of academic achievement at this level. Section 5 outlines broad guidelines for Honours equivalence.
- (iv) **Non-standard qualification.** An applicant not holding standard academic qualifications will be required to demonstrate that they have an appropriate combination of knowledge and skills that are considered equivalent to those gained via required academic qualifications. Section 6 outlines broad guidelines for special circumstances.

5. Assessing Equivalence of Academic Qualifications

Principles and structure of Honours at UNSW are outlined in the *Structure of Honours Programs – Policy*.

Honours equivalence assessment requires evaluation of the grades achieved in courses of study as well as consideration of the disciplinary expectations of the research component of the qualification.

5.1 Coursework

Assessment of the coursework component for honours equivalence should examine both the disciplinary knowledge gained and the grades achieved.

- (i) Disciplinary knowledge should be appropriate to the research proposed, providing the requisite prior learning that will support a timely completion.
- (ii) Grades achieved should be converted to a UNSW equivalent percentage score.
- (iii) In assessing equivalence of qualifications from other institutions, the curriculum undertaken and standing of the institution in the field of education may be taken into account.

5.2 Research

The applicant needs to demonstrate they have:

- (i) Undertaken research comprising design and conduct of a scholarly investigation in the context of an existing body of knowledge.
- (ii) Critically analysed and evaluated the outcome in that context and effectively communicated the process verbally and in writing.

Research in this context means undertaking scholarly investigation and producing related outputs which typically includes a supervised research dissertation completed as a component of an undergraduate and/or postgraduate program sufficient to allow assessment of research potential at the disciplinary level.

5.3 Evaluation of research

Assessment of research requires evaluation of:

- (i) Formal research courses in a degree program, such as research projects, dissertations or thesis projects or other courses of study identified as contributing to development of research skills; or
- (ii) Research activities undertaken including employment in a research position or practice in a creative discipline and outputs from the research such as publications and exhibitions; or
- (iii) A combination of formal research courses and research activities and outputs where (i) or (ii) alone do not demonstrate sufficient level of research performance.

6. Assessing Equivalence of Professional Qualifications and Experience

Where an applicant does not demonstrate honours equivalence via their formal academic qualifications, their knowledge and skills should be assessed through evaluation of experience and outputs.

Applicants should address their level of attainment against the specific knowledge, skills and dispositions outlined in Table 1 in Section 7 and should provide evidence for their level of attainment.

An applicant should also provide:

- (i) Transcripts from any tertiary academic qualifications attempted or completed and the grades achieved; and
- (ii) Details of contributions to:
 - scholarly paper/s appearing in recognised academic journal/s or in volumes published by recognised academic publishers; and/or
 - published research report/s prepared for industry, government or other institutions, which adhere to the broad conventions of academic publishing; and/or
 - a portfolio of published creative work together with any published discussion/exegesis of some or all of that work and which demonstrates the applicants development of a scholarly approach to creative work as a research investigation.

7. Admission to UNSW Research Degrees

Entry to research programs requires demonstration of preparedness for the program. The field/s of both the qualification completed and the research component must be taken into account during the application process since further study may be required where the qualification is not in the same discipline.

7.1 Prior learning and disposition expectations

Table 1 summarises the prior learning and disposition expectations for admission to HDR programs at UNSW. It is assumed that the knowledge and skills required for admission to the PhD are attained in applicants who have achieved a UNSW Honours degree at Class 2 Division 1 level (see section 7.2).

Table 1. Prior learning and disposition expectations for HDR admissions

Prior knowledge	Prior Skills	Dispositions
Bachelor degree level knowledge of the discipline	Writing and analytical skills demonstrated by development of a preliminary research proposal	Motivation and enthusiasm for the program
Knowledge of research principles and problem solving	English language skills demonstrated by appropriate tests where required	Capacity for independent thought
Understanding of research methods used in the discipline	Verbal communication skills demonstrated by interview with prospective supervisor	Capacity for teamwork where appropriate
	Cognitive skills appropriate to Honours or Master level outcomes where appropriate	
	Technical skills appropriate to research in the discipline demonstrated by interview with prospective supervisor	

7.2 Honours 2/1 equivalence

Table 2 summarises examples of equivalence to UNSW honours 2/1. Those who have not attained a qualification at this level need to demonstrate equivalent outcomes through provision of appropriate evidence.

Table 2. Honours 2/1 and equivalence

Honours 2/1 – Australian Qualification
3 year bachelor degree from an Australian University followed by a discrete Honours year including an appropriate research component with Honours 2/1 result
4 year (or more) bachelor degree from an Australian University incorporating an Honours qualification including an appropriate research component with Honours 2/1 result
Honours 2/1 Equivalence - formal academic qualifications
3 year (or more) Bachelor degree followed by completion of a MRes where the research component is no less than 2/3 of the program. If the MRes is considered equivalent to UNSW, this may be considered Honours 1 equivalent
3 year (or more) Bachelor degree followed by a Masters (Coursework) with a research component sufficient to allow assessment of research potential at the disciplinary level and where weighted average grades for the research component and the coursework results are at least equivalent to 75/100
3 year (or more) Bachelor degree followed by a postgraduate qualification that contains a research component sufficient to allow assessment of research potential at the disciplinary level and where weighted average grades for the research component and the coursework results are at least equivalent to 75/100
4 year (or more) Bachelor degree with a research component included sufficient to allow assessment of research potential at the disciplinary level and where weighted average grades for the research component and the coursework results are at least equivalent to 75/100
A combination of academic and professional qualifications that demonstrate achievement at Bachelor and/or Master level including appropriate research components that allow assessment of research potential at the disciplinary level and where weighted average grades for the research component and the coursework results are at least equivalent to 75/100
Qualifications undertaken more than 5 years before application
A qualification assessed as honours 2/1 equivalent and completed more than 5 years prior to the proposed date of HDR commencement requires additional evidence of appropriate work and/or research experience not undertaken as part of an award course and demonstration of research potential via a written research proposal and support confirmed by appropriate referees and the proposed supervisors

7.3 Specific admission criteria

Specific admission criteria for higher degree by research programs are outlined in the Conditions for Award of the degree.

7.4 Conflict of interest

Potential conflict of interest should be declared in any admission evaluation or recommendation.

8. Acknowledgements

The following reference points were used in preparing this guideline:

- Australian Qualifications Framework
- Graduate Research Good Practice Principles

Information obtained from personal communication and the websites of the University of Western Australia and the University of Tasmania are acknowledged.

Eversole and Allison. Justifying Sector-based experience as commensurate with the skills required for entry in to an HDR.

http://www.utas.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/68159/case_for_honours_equivalenc_e.pdf [accessed September 24, 2013]

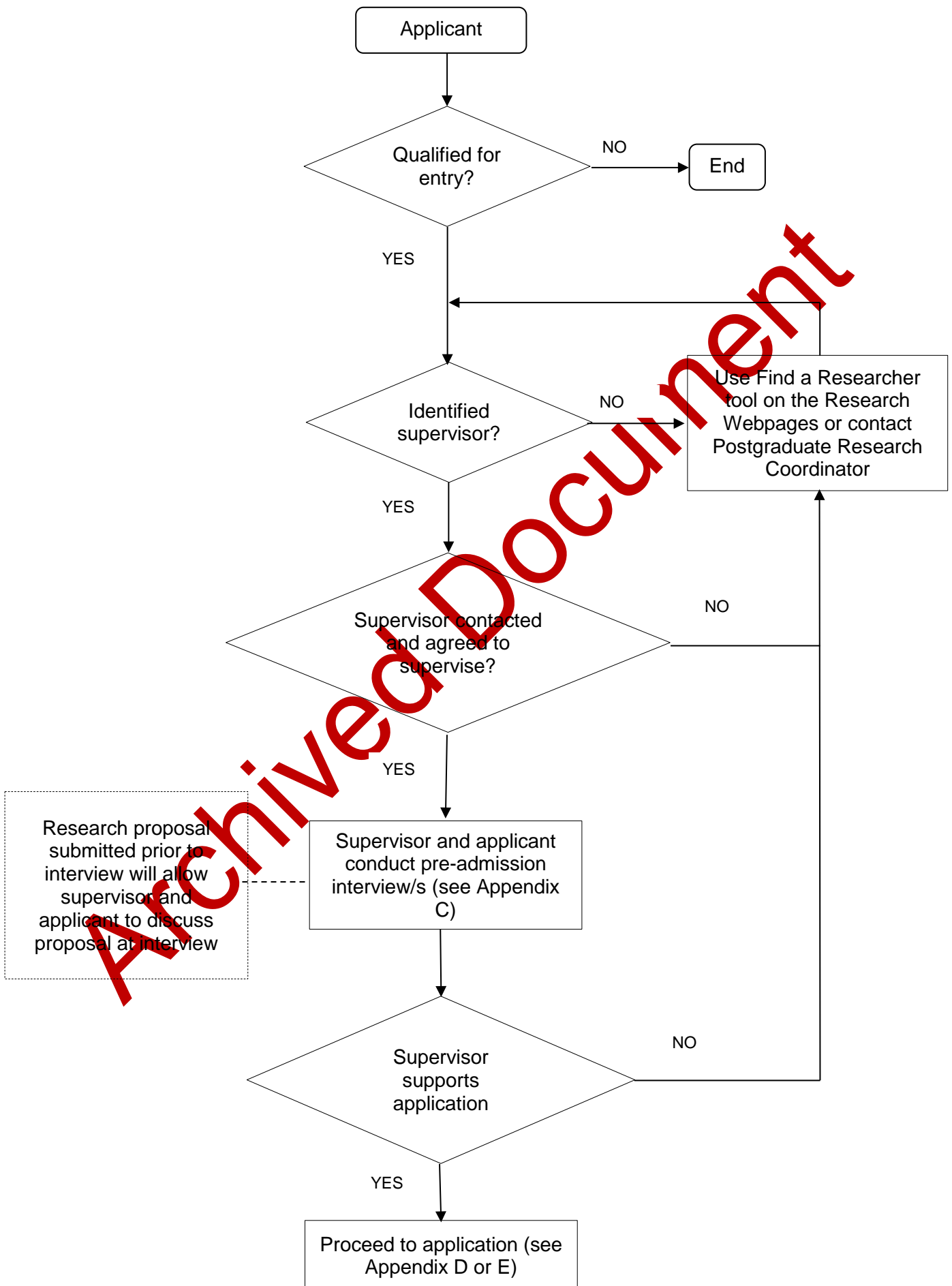
<http://gradschool.about.com/> [accessed September 24, 2013]

Appendix A: History

Version	Authorised by	Approval Date	Effective Date	Sections modified
1.0	Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)	16 October 2014	15 October 2014	New Guideline

Archived Document

Appendix B: Pre-admission process



Appendix C. Pre-Admission Interview Guide.

Early career academics or academics who are new to supervision should consider participating in supervisor development programs such as those offered by the Researcher Development Unit.

Questions that could be asked by prospective supervisors:

Research interest/proposal

Supervisors should request a research proposal or other piece of writing from an applicant prior to the interview. This can then be discussed during interview.

- Tell me about your proposed research.
- What attracts you to my (our) research/research group?
- Did your prior studies prepare you well for conducting this research (are your prior studies in a cognate discipline)?

Qualifications

Supervisor should request transcripts from an applicant prior to the interview. These can then be discussed during interview.

- In University, what courses did you enjoy the most? The least? Why?
- Did you receive any awards or prizes for your prior university degrees?

Motivation

- Explain your motivation for doing this program and provide examples in support of your high motivation for graduate research.
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What do you know about our program and why did you choose to apply to UNSW?
- What other Universities are you considering?
- What do you believe your greatest challenge will be if you are accepted into this program?
- What are your career goals? Why did you choose this pathway? How will this program help you achieve your goals?

Independence

- In what way has your previous experience prepared you for graduate research in our program?
- Explain a situation in which you had a conflict and how you resolved it. What would you do differently? Why?
- Describe any research project you've worked on. What was the purpose of the project and what was your role in the project? What skills did you gain during your research?

Funding

- How do you intend to finance your education?

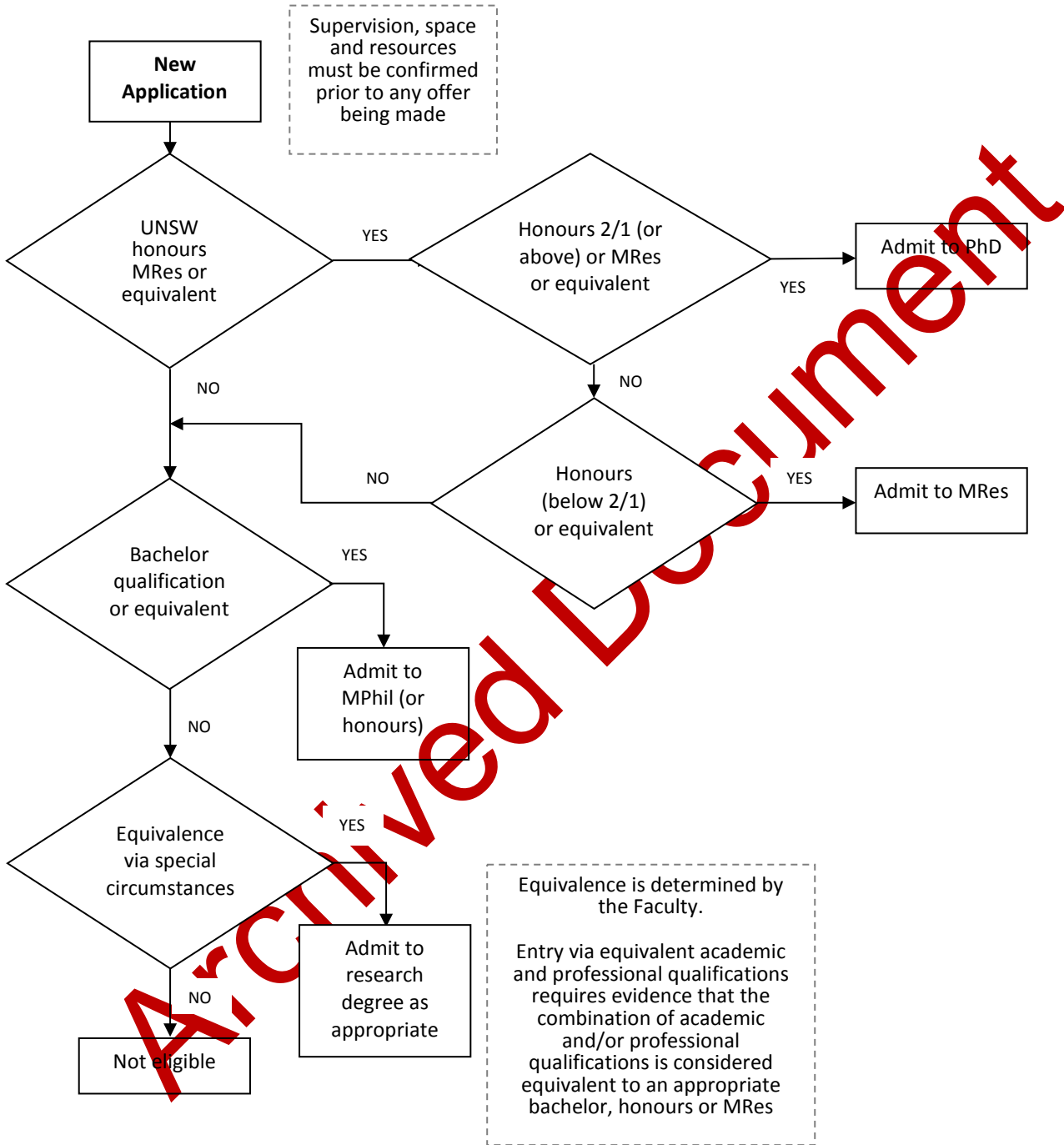
A supervisor should give an applicant the opportunity to ask any questions they may have.

Questions applicants should consider asking:

- What characteristics are specific to this program and distinguish it from competitors?
- Where are recent alumni employed? What do most students do after graduation?
- What types of financial aid are offered? What criteria are used for choosing recipients?
- Are there any scholarships or fellowships available? How do I apply?
- Are there teaching opportunities, such as teaching assistantships and adjunct positions?
- Do most students publish an article or present a paper before graduation?
- What resources are provided to support the research and travel associated with attending conferences?
- What planned practical experiences are included in the program (e.g., internships)? Ask for examples of internship placements.
- What professional skills development opportunities are there for postgraduate researchers?
- How are mentoring and advising relationships established? Are advisors assigned?
- How long do most students take to graduate? How many years of course work (if applicable)? How long do most students take to complete their dissertations?
- Do most students live near campus? What is it like to live in this area as a graduate student (ask to other students)

Adapted from <http://gradschool.about.com/od/interviews/a/inttoask.htm> [Accessed September 24, 2013]

Appendix D. Admission pathway for candidates who have not previously studied in a research program at the same level for which they are applying



Appendix E. Admission pathway for candidates who have in the past 3 years studied or are currently studying in a research program at the same level.

