



POSTGRADUATE SCHOLARSHIPS SCHEME-SPECIFIC PEER REVIEW GUIDELINES FOR FUNDING COMMENCING IN 2019

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INTRODUCTION

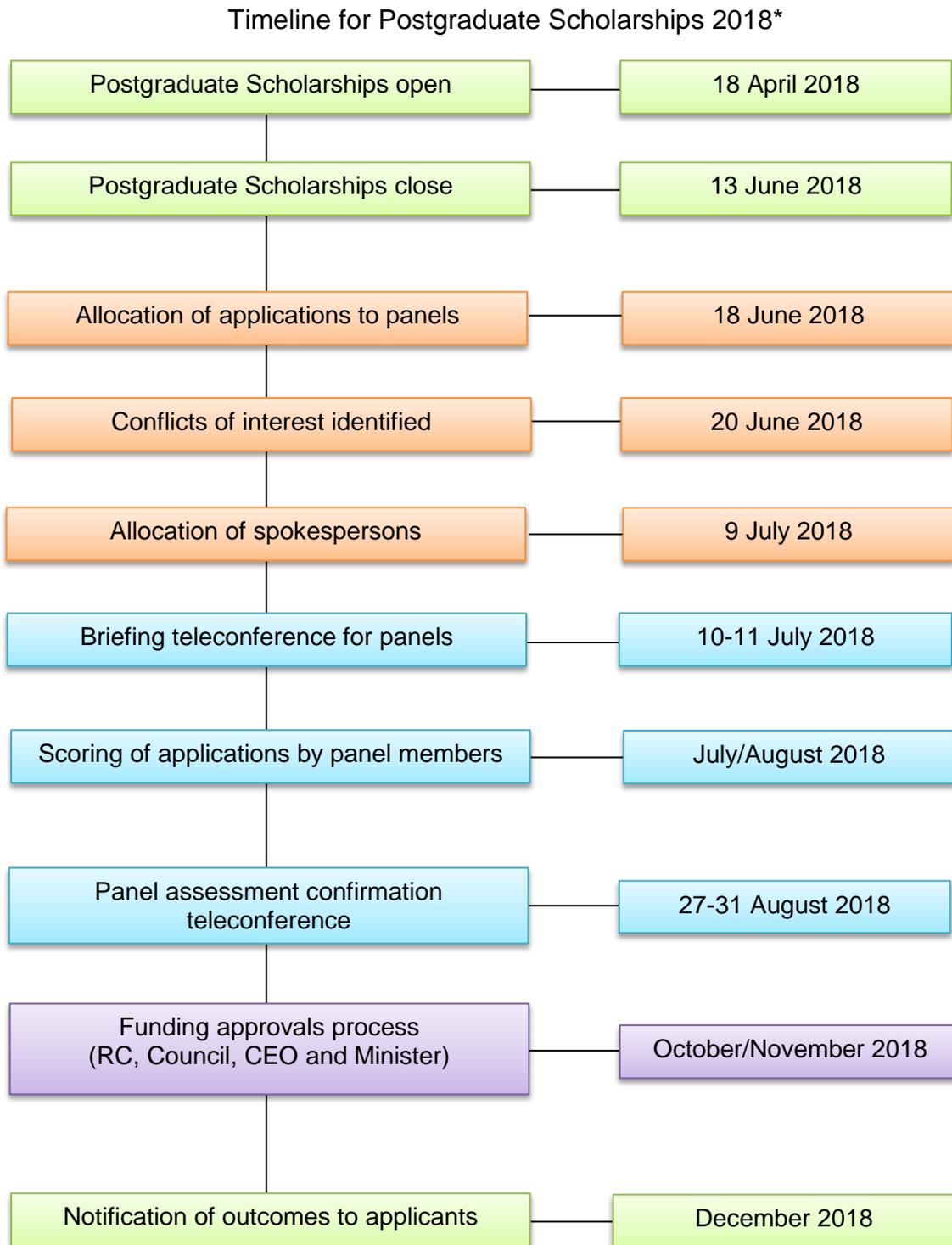
The following sections describe the specific processes, timelines and expectations that apply to the peer review of Postgraduate Scholarships (PGS) applications.

These scheme-specific guidelines complement and must be read in conjunction with the following supporting documents:

- the *2018 Guide to NHMRC Peer Review*, which outlines the overarching principles and obligations under which the NHMRC peer review process operates
- the *2018 NHMRC Funding Rules*, incorporating the *Postgraduate Scholarships Scheme-Specific Funding Rules*, which set out the rules, objectives and other considerations relevant to NHMRC funding
- the *2018 NHMRC Advice and Instructions to Applicants*, incorporating the *Postgraduate Scholarships Scheme-Specific Advice and Instructions to Applicants*, which provide guidance to assist researchers and Administering Institutions with preparing and submitting applications.

It is recommended that you read the *2018 Guide to NHMRC Peer Review* before reading these scheme-specific guidelines.

1. OVERVIEW OF THE PEER REVIEW PROCESS



*Dates are indicative only and subject to change

2. KEY CHANGES TO THE PEER REVIEW PROCESS

- *Section 4.8 Nomination of Applications for Discussion at Teleconference.*
 - Nomination of applications for discussion at teleconference is no longer restricted to the top 50% of the provisional order of merit list.

3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The roles and responsibilities of those participating in the PGS peer review process are identified in the Postgraduate Scholarships Peer Review Participants Table below. These roles are specific to the PGS peer review process, and therefore take precedence over the general descriptions in the *2018 NHMRC Guide to Peer Review*.

Postgraduate Scholarships Peer Review Participants Table

Roles	Responsibilities
Community Observer	<p>The Peer Review Panels (PRPs) may have independent observers present during teleconferences. Observers will be briefed on PRP procedures. They will not participate in the discussion of any applications.</p> <p>The primary duties and responsibilities of an observer are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify and advise the NHMRC of all real or potential Conflicts of Interests (Cols) they have with applications • monitor procedural aspects of the PRPs • provide feedback to NHMRC on the consistency of procedures.
PRP Chair	<p>Chairs are appointed to be independent of the review of applications and to manage the process of peer review in accordance with the approved Guidelines.</p> <p>The primary duties and responsibilities of the PRP Chair are to ensure NHMRC's procedures are adhered to and that a fair and equitable consideration is given to every application being reviewed by the PRP. Chairs will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • familiarise themselves with the policy documentation relevant to the PGS scheme • identify and advise the NHMRC of all real or potential Cols they have with applications assigned to their PRP • confirm all Col rulings and ensure appropriate action is taken in relation to declared Cols • familiarise themselves with <u>all</u> applications being considered by the PRP • ensure that members and community observers are aware of the names and affiliations of the applicants under discussion to ensure Col guidelines are followed • ensure procedures are followed • keep discussion on time and focused • promote good engagement by Spokespersons and PRP members • ensure career disruptions are considered • ensure consistency across reviews • assist PRP members in fulfilling their duties and responsibilities • approve relevant <i>Meeting Attendance Record</i> sheets.
PRP Member	<p>The primary duties and responsibilities of a PRP member are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • familiarise themselves with policy documentation relevant to the PGS scheme • identify and advise the NHMRC of all real or potential Cols they have with applications in their PRP • provide a fair and impartial assessment against the assessment criteria in a timely manner • consider track record relative to opportunity and career disruption

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide scores against the assessment criteria for <u>all</u> applications reviewed by the PRP (where a high Col does not exist) • nominate up to two applications for discussion at the Panel Assessment Confirmation teleconference • prepare for and participate in panel discussion of nominated applications, paying particular attention to those applications for which they are 1SP or 2SP (see duties and responsibilities of 1SP and 2SP below).
Primary Spokesperson (1SP)	<p>The primary duties and responsibilities of a 1SP in addition to that of a standard PRP member are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lead the PRP teleconference discussion on the competitiveness of the application with reference to the assessment criteria • ensure productivity 'relative to opportunity' considerations highlighted in the application, including career disruptions, are considered by panel members in any discussion of the application • Indigenous Health Research Experts from the Indigenous panel will write external assessments for those applications that have applied in another category • if applicable, highlight comments from external advisor reports.
Secondary Spokesperson (2SP)	<p>The primary duties and responsibilities of a 2SP in addition to that of a standard PRP member are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure productivity 'relative to opportunity' considerations highlighted in the application, including career disruptions, are considered by panel members in any discussion of the application • support the application discussion at the PRP teleconference on the competitiveness of the application with reference to the assessment criteria.
Senior NHMRC Staff	<p>NHMRC staff with doctoral degrees or extensive research expertise will be involved in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • confirming Electromagnetic Energy Research (EME) applications comply with NHMRC/ ARPANSA requirements • reviewing allocation of applications to panels and Spokespersons • establishing the peer review panels • reviewing sensitive career disruptions • assisting and advising on the peer review process.
NHMRC Staff	<p>Under direction from the CEO, NHMRC staff will be responsible for overall administration of the peer review process and for the conduct of specific activities, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • approach potential PRP members and Chairs • rule on level of declared Cols • determine eligibility • assign applications to the appropriate panels and assign spokespersons • provide a briefing to panel members • act as an alternative independent Chair when the PRP Chair has a Col with the application under consideration • provide the following administrative support and advice to the Chair and members: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ facilitate use of RGMS ○ provide policy advice to the PRP Chair and members including on the management of Cols ○ maintain accurate records of Cols ○ ensure that the Chair and panel members are aware of all Col declared by members ○ provide advice on the treatment of declared Cols ○ provide advice on dealing with sensitive career disruptions • ensure that Community Observers are fully aware of the names and affiliations of the applicants under discussion to ensure Col

	<p>guidelines are followed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure that all PRP members and assessors are provided with the necessary information to review each application • maintain scoring records for each application • record outcome of PRP recommendations • act as the first point of contact for PRP members and Community Observers • seek feedback from Chairs, PRP members and Community Observers on improvements for future processes.
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4. PEER REVIEW PROCESS

The NHMRC peer review process is designed to provide a rigorous, fair, transparent and consistent assessment of the merits of each application according to the [NHMRC Principles of Peer Review](#).

All applications are assessed against the Assessment Criteria as set out in the *Postgraduate Scholarship Scheme-Specific Funding Rules for funding commencing in 2019*, using the Category Descriptors at [Attachment A](#). Applications that relate to the improvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health are also assessed against the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* as set out in section 6.3 of the *2018 NHMRC Funding Rules*.

Applications are assessed relative to opportunity, taking into consideration any career disruptions (see section 6.2 of the *2018 NHMRC Funding Rules*).

An overview of the PGS peer review process can be found at section 1 of this document. Further detail about each step is provided below.

4.1 Receipt and Initial Processing of Applications

NHMRC staff will verify that PGS applications meet eligibility criteria. Applicants will be advised if their application is ineligible. However, in some instances these applications will remain in the peer review process until their ineligibility is confirmed by NHMRC staff. Eligibility rulings may be made at any point in the peer review process (refer to section 7 of the *2018 NHMRC Funding Rules*).

4.2 Assignment of Applications to Panels

Applications are assigned to a PRP based on the category of PGS and/or fields of research chosen by applicants within their RGMS application, the supervisor's expertise and/or advice from the peer review panel.

4.3 Identification of Conflicts of Interest (Col)

Panel members will be provided access, via NHMRCs RGMS, to the Summary Snapshot Report of each application assigned to their PRP, and will declare their Col in accordance with the guidelines provided on the [NHMRC website](#).

Panel members will be given access to the full application only if they have no or a low Col. Where panel members declare that they have a high Col they will not be granted access to the application.

Some members may have a Col for which they require a ruling. For these, NHMRC will assess the information in the declaration made by the member and specify a level of participation in RGMS. Members are requested to ensure they include sufficient detail in their declaration to ensure an accurate Col assessment can be made by NHMRC staff. All Col declarations and rulings will be made available for the Panel Chair and members to review. If the Panel Chair or a member is uncomfortable with a ruling level, they can raise this with NHMRC staff and request a review.

Cols must be declared at the beginning of the peer review process. However, Cols may be declared at any stage of the peer review process if new conflicts become apparent.

4.4 Allocation of Spokespersons

Taking into account CoIs, NHMRC staff will assign each application a 1SP and 2SP. It is expected that each member of the PRP (apart from the Chair) will be allocated an equal proportion of applications as 1SP and 2SP, based on any CoIs declared.

4.5 Assessment of applications with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health focus

Applications relating specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' health will be identified by information provided in the application. NHMRC Assigners Academy members with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health expertise will confirm that these applications have at least 20% of their research effort and/or capacity building focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

For applications confirmed as relating specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research not in the Indigenous health category, NHMRC will endeavour to obtain at least one external assessment from a member of the Indigenous health PRP.

The External Assessment review will have a particular focus on the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* (see section 6.3 of the *2018 NHMRC Funding Rules*). This assessment is to be considered by PRP members when scoring.

4.6 Briefing Teleconference

NHMRC will conduct panel briefing teleconference(s) to discuss panel member duties and responsibilities associated with the PGS peer review process. Any changes to the scheme for the current application round will also be highlighted and discussed as necessary.

4.7 Initial Scoring

PRP members must assess and score all applications assigned to their panel against the assessment criteria using the PGS category descriptors ([Attachment A](#)), taking into account career disruptions and other relative to opportunity considerations (for explanation of these concepts refer to sections 6.2 Relative to Opportunity and 6.2.1 Career Disruption of the *2018 NHMRC Funding Rules*).

For applications with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander health research focus, the assessment should take into consideration the NHMRC's *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* and external assessment, where applicable.

The PRP members will be required to enter their scores in RGMS. PRP members should not discuss applications prior to the teleconference. This is to ensure PRP members provide completely independent scores. PRP members must ensure prompt completion of scores within RGMS.

A quorum of at least 50% of panel members must be involved for an application to be reviewed and scored by a PRP.

The criterion scores from each panel member will be combined to create a provisional ranked list of applications. This list will be accessed by PRP members in RGMS prior to the assessment confirmation teleconference for their review.

4.8 Nomination of Applications for Discussion at Teleconference

PRP members will be given the opportunity to nominate up to two applications for discussion at the teleconference. It is expected that the main reason a particular application would be nominated for discussion is due to an anomaly in the scoring which warrants discussion by the PRP.

PRP members will be required to submit their nominations to NHMRC at least three business days prior to the teleconference. The NHMRC will then circulate a list of applications nominated for discussion to the panel members in advance of the teleconference. The list of nominated applications will be the only

applications discussed by the PRP at the teleconference and will be grouped so as to best cater for CoIs.

If the PRP is satisfied with the ranked list and no applications have been nominated for discussion the Assessment Confirmation Teleconference will not be required. The panel Chair will confirm in writing that no Assessment Confirmation Teleconference is required because the panel is satisfied with the final order of merit list.

4.9 Peer Review Panel Assessment Confirmation Teleconference

Following the initial scoring of applications, the provision of the consolidated ranked list and the nomination of applications for discussion, each panel will meet via teleconference to confirm the scores of the applications nominated for discussion.

The process for the teleconference is as follows:

1. The Chair will outline the format of the process for the teleconference.
2. With overall discussion being led by the Chair, the PRP should consider the applications nominated for discussion:
 - i. Where a panel member has a high CoI with an application(s), the panel member will be excluded from participating in the discussion of that application(s) and will be required to disconnect from the teleconference.
 - ii. The panel member that nominated the application for discussion will be invited to put their case forward to the rest of the panel as to why they believe the scoring of that particular application should be revisited.
 - iii. The 1SP will be invited to summarise the applicant's case to the rest of the panel ensuring they communicate any relative to opportunity considerations, including career disruptions, along with any additional areas of concern (e.g. level of independence, track record, applicant's potential for a future high level research career etc.). If applicable the 1SP will outline comments received from the external assessor.
 - iv. The 2SP will be invited to add any additional comments.
 - v. Other PRP members will then be invited to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the application against the assessment criteria only.
 - vi. It is important that the PRP consider the merits of the application in relation to the assessment criteria rather than whether the application is considered fundable.
 - vii. The Chair will seek to determine whether or not the majority of the panel wishes to rescore that particular application. The scores of an application nominated for discussion should be altered only if the majority of scoring members agree that the score for that particular application should be altered.
 - viii. If the majority of the panel does not agree that the score should be altered, then the pre-teleconference scores for that application will remain.

4.10 Re-scoring of applications

Following the discussion of a nominated application, panel members will be given the opportunity to alter their score for each criterion in RGMS. Panel members can choose not to change their score during the re-scoring process.

It is important that panel members realise that by re-scoring an application, it may cause the application to move up or down in the list by multiple places. A final order of merit list will not be provided to the panel.

4.11 Funding Recommendation

After the peer review Assessment Confirmation Teleconference, applicant scores are normalised across all panels. These normalised final scores are used to produce an order of merit.

This overall ranked list will be used in preparing the funding recommendations for NHMRC's Research Committee (refer to section 11.4 of the *2018 NHMRC Funding Rules* for further information).

Those applications that are below the funding level but considered to be fundable and competitive will serve as the reserve list.

4.12 PRP Documentation

PRP members must retain their speaking notes and any other notes they make of the peer review process until the outcomes of the panel's deliberations are finalised. For PRP meetings, this is when the order of merit has been determined. After this time, notes, both hard copy and electronic, should be disposed of appropriately.

ATTACHMENT A

Category Descriptors for assessing Postgraduate Scholarship applications

The following scoring descriptors are to be used as a guide to score an application against each of the assessment criteria. The category descriptors are indicative, rather than definitive or exhaustive. Evaluation of performance will take into account opportunity, research discipline and overall summation of research contribution.

Assessing Indigenous Contributions

It is recognised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants often make additional valuable contributions to policy development, clinical/public health leadership and/or service delivery, community activities and linkages, and are often representatives on key committees. If applicable, these contributions should be considered when assessing research output and track record.

Score	Criterion 1	Criterion 2	Criterion 3
	Academic Record and Research Achievement – Relative to Opportunity 60%	Research Environment and Supervisor 20%	Research Project 20%
<p>7 Exemplary An application which clearly and strongly supports the aims of the scheme and meets all the assessment criteria with no weaknesses.</p> <p>It is expected that the top 2% of applications would be ranked in this category.</p>	<p>Exemplary Academic Merit for Field/Discipline (e.g. MBBS, Public Health), signified by (for example):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> academic record medals, prizes and awards quantity and quality of research publications in their field presentations, including posters and seminars postgraduate/research training and/or research/professional experience broader community engagement. 	<p>The Research Environment And Supervisor:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> are extremely well matched to the applicant's proposed project provide exemplary mentoring and training arrangements include extremely high quality research support systems for the applicant offer exceptional collaborative opportunities for the applicant offer exemplary opportunity to extend the applicant's knowledge and skills. 	<p>The Research Project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> has objectives that are extremely well-defined is flawless by design will be achieved will make an exemplary contribution to the applicant's future career aspirations.
<p>6 Outstanding An application which clearly and strongly supports the aims of the scheme and meets all the assessment criteria with negligible weaknesses.</p>	<p>Outstanding Academic Merit for Field/Discipline (e.g. MBBS, Public Health), signified by (for example):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> academic record medals, prizes and awards research achievement and productivity commensurate with authorship of research 	<p>The Research Environment And Supervisor:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> are very well matched to the applicant's proposed project include outstanding mentoring and training arrangements offer very high quality research support systems for the applicant 	<p>The Research Project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> has objectives that are very well-defined is nearly flawless by design is highly feasible will make an outstanding contribution to the applicant's future career aspirations.

Score	Criterion 1	Criterion 2	Criterion 3
	Academic Record and Research Achievement – Relative to Opportunity 60%	Research Environment and Supervisor 20%	Research Project 20%
<p><i>It is expected that the top 15% of applications would be ranked in this category or higher.</i></p>	<p>publications, book chapters and presentations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • postgraduate/research training and/or research/professional experience • broader community engagement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • offer outstanding collaborative opportunities for the applicant • offer outstanding potential to extend the applicant's knowledge and skills. 	
<p>5 Excellent <i>An application which supports the aims of the scheme and meets the assessment criteria with only some minor weaknesses.</i></p> <p><i>It is expected that the top 35% of applications would be ranked in this category or higher.</i></p>	<p>Excellent Academic Merit for Field/Discipline (e.g. MBBS, Public Health), signified by (for example):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • academic record • medals, prizes and awards • research achievement and productivity commensurate with authorship of research publications, book chapters and presentations. • postgraduate/research training and/or research/professional experience • broader community engagement. 	<p>The Research Environment And Supervisor:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are well matched to the applicant's proposed project • include excellent mentoring and training arrangements • offer high quality research support systems for the applicant • offer excellent collaborative opportunities for the applicant • offer excellent potential to extend the applicant's knowledge and skills. 	<p>The Research Project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has objectives that are well-defined • is very well designed • is highly feasible • will make an excellent contribution to the applicant's future career aspirations.
<p>4 Very good <i>An application which supports the aims of the scheme and meets the assessment criteria, but with numerous minor weaknesses</i></p> <p><i>It is expected that the top 65% of applications would be ranked in this category or higher.</i></p>	<p>Very Good Academic Merit for Field/Discipline (e.g. MBBS, Public Health), signified by (for example):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • academic record • medals, prizes and awards • research achievement and productivity commensurate with authorship of research publications, book chapters and presentations. • postgraduate/research training and/or research/professional experience • broader community engagement. 	<p>The Research Environment And Supervisor:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are suited to the applicant's proposed project • includes very good quality mentoring and training arrangements • offer very good quality research support systems for the applicant • offer very good collaborative opportunities for the applicant • offer very good potential to extend the applicant's knowledge and skills. 	<p>The Research Project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has objectives that are clear • is well designed • is feasible • will make a very good contribution to the applicant's future career aspirations.

Score	Criterion 1	Criterion 2	Criterion 3
	Academic Record and Research Achievement – Relative to Opportunity 60%	Research Environment and Supervisor 20%	Research Project 20%
<p>3 Good An application which supports the aims of the scheme and meets the assessment criteria, but with at least one moderate weakness</p> <p>It is expected that the bottom 35% of applications would be ranked in this category or lower.</p>	<p>Good Academic Merit for Field/Discipline (e.g. MBBS, Public Health), signified by (for example):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> academic record medals, prizes and awards research achievement and productivity commensurate with authorship of research publications, book chapters and presentations. postgraduate/research training and/or research/professional experience broader community engagement. 	<p>The Research Environment And Supervisor:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> are somewhat suited to the applicant's proposed project includes good quality mentoring and training arrangements offer good quality research support systems for the applicant offer good collaborative opportunities for the applicant offer good potential to extend the applicant's knowledge and skills. 	<p>The Research Project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> has objectives that are adequately defined is overall clear in respects to design is likely to be achieved will make a good contribution to the applicant's future career aspirations.
<p>2 Satisfactory An application which partly meets the aims of the scheme or assessment criteria with noticeable deficiencies or shortcomings evident by some moderate weaknesses</p> <p>It is expected that the bottom 15% of applications would be ranked in this category or lower.</p>	<p>Sound Academic Merit for Field/Discipline (e.g. MBBS, Public Health), signified by (for example):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> academic record medals, prizes and awards research achievement and productivity commensurate with authorship of research publications, book chapters and presentations. postgraduate/research training and/or research/professional experience broader community engagement. 	<p>The Research Environment and Supervisor:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> are adequate to the applicant's proposed project includes satisfactory mentoring and training arrangements offer satisfactory research support systems for the applicant offer satisfactory collaborative opportunities for the applicant offer satisfactory potential to extend the applicant's knowledge and skills. 	<p>The Research Project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> has objectives that are somewhat unclearly defined raises some concerns with respect to research design raises some concerns with respect to feasibility will make a satisfactory contribution to the applicant's future career aspirations.
<p>1 Weak An application which marginally meets the aims of the scheme or assessment criteria. Shortcomings or deficiencies against most criteria or aims predominate</p>	<p>Limited Academic Merit for Field/Discipline (e.g. MBBS, Public Health), signified by (for example):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> academic record medals, prizes and awards research achievement and productivity commensurate with authorship of research publications, book chapters and presentations. postgraduate/research training and/or 	<p>The Research Environment and Supervisor:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> are not ideal to the applicant's proposed project Includes limited mentoring and training arrangements offer limited research support systems for the applicant offer limited collaborative opportunities for the applicant offer limited potential to extend the applicant's knowledge and skills. 	<p>The Research Project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> has objectives that are unclear raises major concerns with respect to research design raises major concerns with respect to feasibility will make a limited contribution to the applicant's future career aspirations.

Score	Criterion 1	Criterion 2	Criterion 3
	Academic Record and Research Achievement – Relative to Opportunity 60%	Research Environment and Supervisor 20%	Research Project 20%
<i>It is expected that the bottom 5% of applications would be ranked in this category or lower.</i>	research/professional experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • broader community engagement. 		