



Managing Your HDR Research as a Project

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Acknowledgment of Country

UTS acknowledges the Gadigal people, the Boorooberongal people of the Dharug Nation, the Bidjigal people and the Gamaygal people, upon whose ancestral lands our university stands. We would also like to pay respect to the Elders both past and present, acknowledging them as the Traditional Custodians for these lands.

Before we start

1

Your worksheet

Open the fillable PDF of "My HDR on One Page" (link in the chat), or print it.

2

The chat

After each question, you will post one short line in the chat.

3

Cameras and sound

Cameras are optional.
Unmute at any time to ask a question.

Why this session

An HDR is a multi-year project.

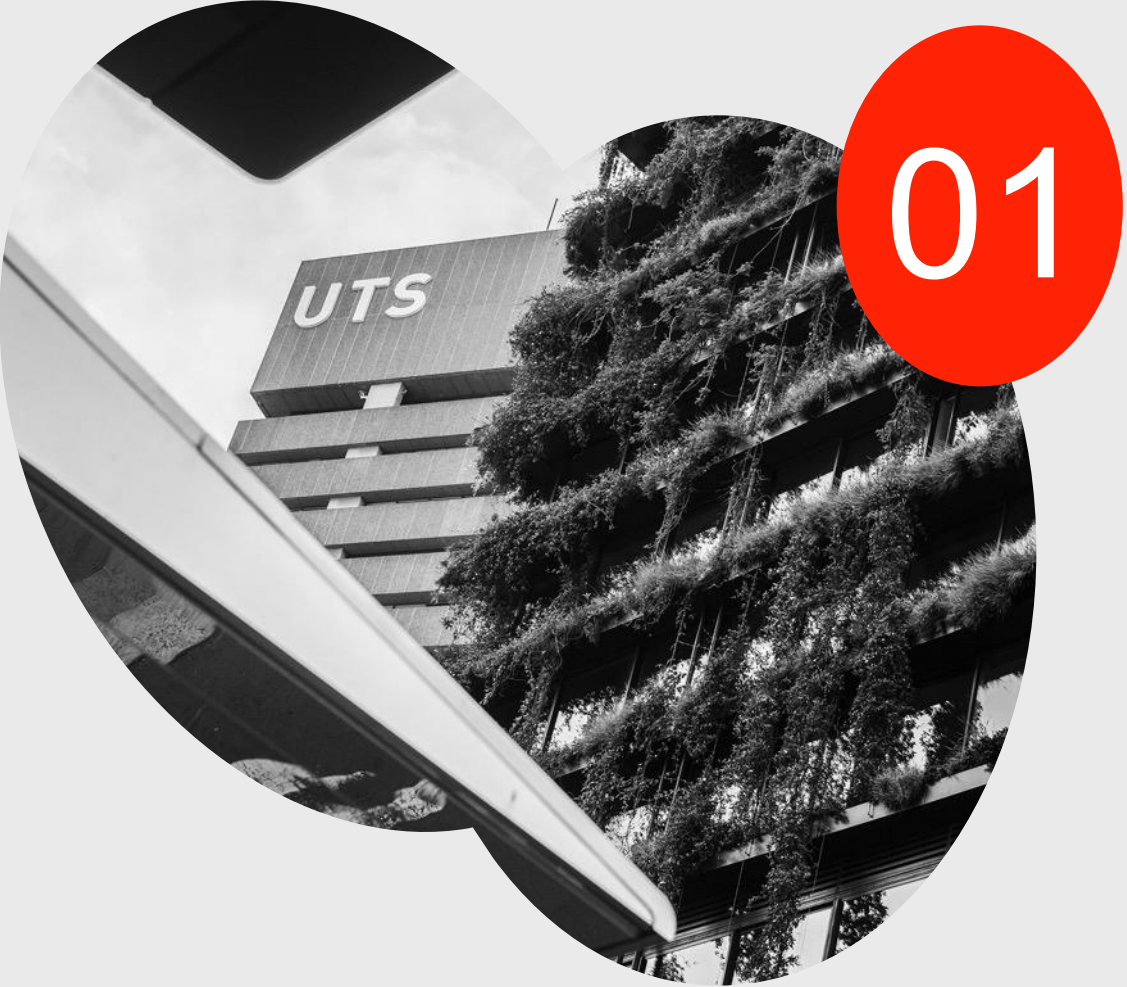
Few candidates are ever shown how to manage one.

Start About 10 minutes

Why project management fits an HDR

Then About 70 minutes

Four questions, one at a time: a short idea, Ari's example, then your own box

A circular inset image on the left side of the slide. It shows a modern building with a prominent vertical garden facade covered in lush green plants. The letters 'UTS' are visible on a section of the building. A red circle with the white number '01' is overlaid on the right side of the circular image.

01

Why project management fits an HDR

About 10 minutes

What is a project?

“A temporary endeavour undertaken to create a unique product, service or result.”

1

A start and an end

2

A defined outcome

3

Limited resources

4

Uncertainty

Is an HDR a project?

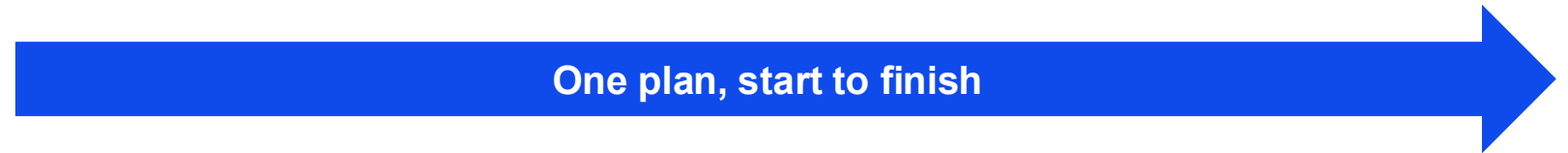
Feature	Your HDR
Temporary	An Expected Work Submission (EWS) date. Maximum time: PhD 4 years full-time or 8 years part-time; Masters by Research 2 years full-time or 4 years part-time.
Unique	An original contribution to knowledge.
Limited resources	Time, scholarship, supervisor attention, data access.
Uncertain	You cannot know your findings in advance.

An HDR is a project with a fixed deadline, a negotiable scope and irreducible uncertainty.

Two ways to plan

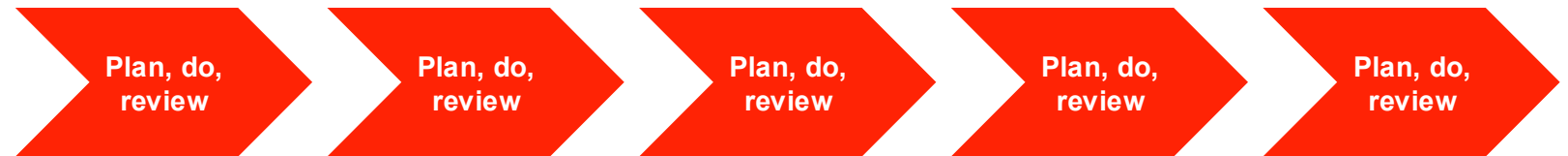
Predictive

Plan everything up front, then control against the plan. Suits stable, well-understood work.



Adaptive

Plan in short cycles, then adjust as you learn. Suits uncertain work.



Current practice chooses the approach according to how much uncertainty there is.

Research is closer to the adaptive end. A detailed year-one timeline will be wrong by year two, and that is normal.

UTS already expects this

Graduate Research Education Framework

refers to research management best practice.

Stage 1 outputs

include a feasibility and risk assessment and a timeline.

Stage 2 outputs

include a refined research plan: questions, methods and timeline.

UTS candidature journey

lists “Project manage your research”.

This session gives you the language and tools for what you are already asked to do.

Four questions every project manager asks

Each question rests on a project management idea. Each box on your worksheet is a small version of a standard project management tool.

Q1

What is the deliverable?

Concept

Scope and scope creep

Your worksheet

Box 1: a short scope statement

Q2

Who decides it is good enough?

Concept

Acceptance criteria

Your worksheet

Box 2: your acceptance criteria

Q3

How do you plan when you cannot see the end?

Concept

Milestones and cycles

Your worksheet

Box 3: a plan for one cycle

Q4

How do you know early that you are off track?

Concept

Risk and early warning

Your worksheet

Box 4: one line of a risk register

How each question works

1. Note your stage: it decides which prompts you follow

Early

before Stage 1

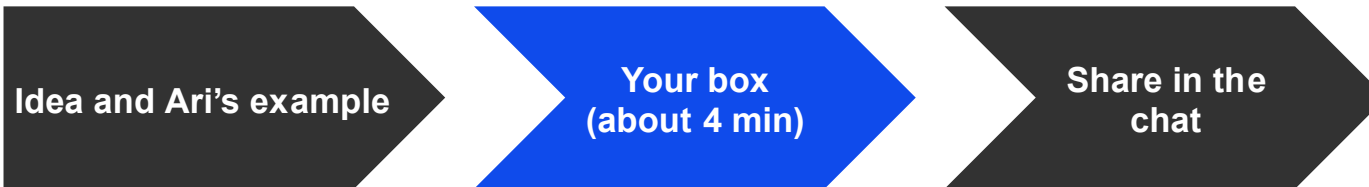
Middle

after Stage 1

Late

preparing for Stage 3 or submission

2. Each question runs in the same order



Share only as much as you are comfortable with.

Four questions, four boxes

Q1 Deliverable: Box 1

Q2 Who decides: Box 2

Q3 Cycles: Box 3

Q4 Early warning: Box 4

Meet Ari, our worked example



Ari

Second-year full-time PhD candidate (international)

Project: How frontline staff in a water utility adapt their work when a new asset data system is introduced

Method: Qualitative case study: 25 interviews planned, 10 completed

Partner: A regional water utility (industry partner)

Supervisors: A principal supervisor in engineering and a co-supervisor from another faculty

Milestones: Stage 1 passed; Stage 2 due in 7 months

Ari is fictional

Ari's boxes show what a usable answer looks like: specific, short and honest.

Your boxes are about your own HDR.

Scope and scope creep

Scope statement

What the project will deliver. In research, the deliverable is an answer, so this is the question your thesis answers.

Exclusions

What the project will not deliver, written down. Without them, scope creep is likely.

Scope creep is gradual, unplanned growth. In research, every finding opens new questions, so it is the default.

Written exclusions are your main defence.

Worked example: Ari's Box 1

Worked example: Ari (fictional)

Box 1. My deliverable

My thesis answers

How do frontline staff in a water utility adapt their work when a new asset data system is introduced?

It will not

Compare utilities in other countries; evaluate the software's technical performance; measure cost savings for the utility.

Why this works

- The question fits in one sentence.
- Each exclusion is something Ari could genuinely have done.

Your turn: Box 1

4 + 3 min

Early

before Stage 1

My thesis answers: your best current version of the question, in one sentence. It can still change.

It will not: one direction you are tempted by but could drop.

Middle

after Stage 1

My thesis answers: your question as it stands now, in one sentence.

It will not: two or three things that are out, including one that tempts you.

Late

preparing for Stage 3 or submission

My thesis answers: the question your thesis actually answers, as an examiner would read it.

It will not: what you will move to a paper or future work instead.

Then, in the chat (3 min): post one item from your 'It will not' list. We'll look at two or three.

Who decides, and against what

In project management, work is accepted at set points, against acceptance criteria agreed in advance.

In your HDR:

Stage assessments

A panel judges your stage outputs against the UTS stage criteria.

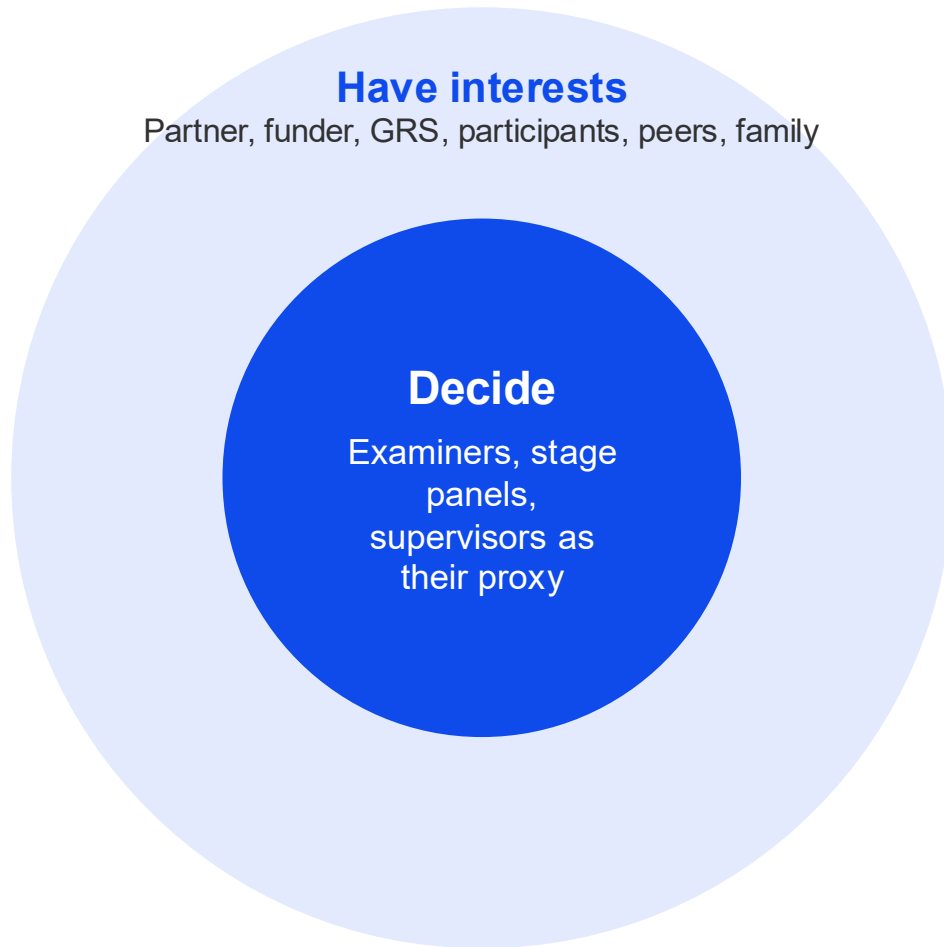
Thesis examination

Examiners judge the thesis against the examination criteria.

Supervisors

Interpret the criteria for you along the way, while also advising you.

Criteria versus interests



Meet the acceptance criteria.

Manage other people's interests.

Common traps

- Treating a partner's or funder's wishes as thesis requirements
- Treating every piece of feedback as equally binding
- Leaving the examiners' standard until writing up

Clarify early: ask your supervisors what the criteria look like in practice.

Worked example: Ari's Box 2

Worked example: Ari (fictional)

Box 2. Who decides it is good enough

Who decides next, and when

The Stage 2 panel, in 7 months.

What they will judge it against

The UTS Stage 2 outputs: a refined instrument, ethics approval, data collected, preliminary results and a refined plan.

One question to ask my supervisors about the standard

How complete do my preliminary results need to be for Stage 2: all 25 interviews, or the first 10 analysed?

Why this works

- It names the criteria, not just the panel.
- The criteria are published, so Ari can check them now.
- The question asks about the standard in concrete terms.

Your turn: Box 2

4 + 3 min

Early

before Stage 1

Who decides next, and when: your Stage 1 panel, and its date.

What they will judge it against: the Stage 1 outputs, centred on your research proposal.

Question for my supervisors: what does a strong Stage 1 proposal look like?

Middle

after Stage 1

Who decides next, and when: your next stage panel, and its date.

What they will judge it against: that stage's outputs, listed on the UTS candidature stages page.

Question for my supervisors: how complete does my work need to be for my next stage?

Late

preparing for Stage 3 or submission

Who decides next, and when: your Stage 3 panel, then your examiners.

What they will judge it against: the Stage 3 outputs, then the examination criteria.

Question for my supervisors: what will examiners in my field look for?

Then, in the chat (3 min): post your question for your supervisors. We'll look at a few together.

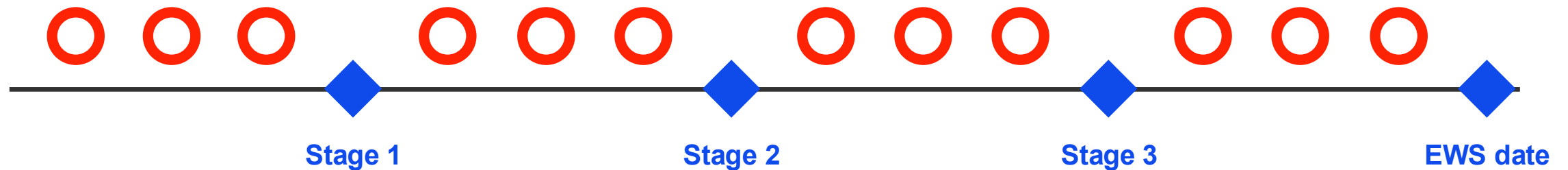
Milestones and cycles

Milestones

Set by UTS and fixed: Stage 1, 2, 3 and your EWS date. Plan the long range at this level.

Cycles

Set by you: 4 to 12 weeks each. Plan in detail only as far as the next cycle.



◆ **Milestone:** fixed, set by UTS

○ **Cycle:** 4 to 12 weeks, set by you

What makes a cycle

Length and end date

Choose a length of 4 to 12 weeks and an end date, then keep the end date. Project managers call this a timebox.

Unfinished work moves to the next cycle.

Output

Something your supervisor can actually review: a draft section, an analysis, a pilot result.

'Make progress on chapter 2' is not an output.

Review

Someone reviews the output on a set date. Then you adjust the plan for the next cycle.

This is where adaptive planning happens.

The full cycle plan, covered in the block program, also records a goal, the blocks of work and what changed.

Worked example: Ari's Box 3

Worked example: Ari (fictional)

Box 3. My next short cycle

Context: my next UTS milestone
Stage 2, due in 7 months.

This cycle
10 weeks, ending at the panel meeting in week 10.

Output my supervisor can review
A 6,000-word draft findings section based on the first 10 interviews.

Reviewed by
Both supervisors, at the panel meeting in week 10.

Why this works

- The milestone is context; the box is about the cycle.
- The output is specific enough to review.
- The review is booked, not hoped for.

Your turn: Box 3

4 + 3 min

Early

before Stage 1

Milestone: Stage 1, and its date.

This cycle: 4 to 6 weeks, with an end date.

Output: for example, a one-page statement of your question or a map of the literature.

Reviewed by: your supervisor, on a date you book now.

Middle

after Stage 1

Milestone: your next stage assessment, and its date.

This cycle: up to 12 weeks, with an end date.

Output: for example, an ethics application, a first analysis or a draft section.

Reviewed by: who, and on what date.

Late

preparing for Stage 3 or submission

Milestone: Stage 3 or your EWS date.

This cycle: work back from that date.

Output: for example, a complete chapter draft or a revised section.

Reviewed by: who, and on what date.

Then, in the chat (3 min): post your cycle output in one line. We'll check: could a supervisor review it?

Risk and early warning

Project managers keep a risk register. Each entry links three things: a risk, a signal and a planned response.

Risk

An uncertain event or condition that, if it occurs, affects your project.

Example: ethics approval takes longer than planned.

Signal

An early, observable sign that the risk is becoming real. In a risk register, this is the trigger.

Example: no committee response by a date you set.

Response

What you will do if the signal appears, decided in advance.

Example: raise it with your supervisor and reorder your work.

Good signals are things you can see, such as a decision made or a draft returned, not how busy you feel. Stage transitions are good moments to check them.

A glimpse of a readiness checklist

Example drawn from UTS Stage 2 outputs

- ☐ Data collection instrument developed and refined
- ☐ Ethics approval obtained
- ☐ Data collected
- ☐ Preliminary results produced
- ☐ Research plan refined

Example only

The UTS stage outputs already work as a readiness checklist. The block program covers how to use them.

Worked example: Ari's Box 4

Worked example: Ari (fictional)

Box 4. My early warning

One risk

The utility restructures and delays access to the remaining 15 interviewees.

The signal that would warn me

Fewer than 3 interviews confirmed by week 4 of the cycle.

What I would do

Raise it at the next supervision meeting and agree a fallback: a second site, or a smaller sample.

Why this works

- The risk is specific to this project.
- The signal is observable and early.
- The response is a decision, not a worry.

Your turn: Box 4

4 + 3 min

Early

before Stage 1

One risk: something that could delay Stage 1, such as a question that will not settle.

Signal: what you would notice early, with a date.

What I would do: your response, decided now.

Middle

after Stage 1

One risk: for example, ethics, data access or a partner.

Signal: something you can observe, with a date.

What I would do: your response, decided now.

Late

preparing for Stage 3 or submission

One risk: something that threatens your submission date, such as slow feedback on drafts.

Signal: for example, a chapter not returned by an agreed date.

What I would do: your response, decided now.

Then, in the chat (3 min): post your risk. We'll look for themes we share.

The four questions

1

What is the deliverable?

2

Who decides it is good enough?

3

How do you plan when you cannot see the end?

4

How do you know early that you are off track?

One thing to try in the next two weeks

Write it in the bottom strip of your worksheet.

Idea 1

Share your exclusion list with your supervisor

Idea 2

Ask your question about the standard

Idea 3

Set the output and end date of your next cycle

Idea 4

Add one risk to your plan

Where to go next

Coming soon: a one- or two-day block program on project management in HDR research, with practical guidance and tools.

Workshop

When Your HDR Research Stalls

UTS HDR Researcher Development

[Open the SharePoint site](#)

Support

Your supervisors; HDR Coordinators and Directors; Graduate Research School; UTS Counselling and Wellbeing

Your feedback

Two minutes, anonymous.

Use the link in the chat, or scan the QR code.

Feedback: Managing Your HDR
Research as a Project





Thank you