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# An introduction to the Individual Development Plan

What is the purpose of an Individual Development Plan?

The Individual Development Plan (IDP) is designed to aid you, as a Higher Degree Research (HDR) student at Charles Sturt University, to:

* **assess your current research skills, interests, strengths and opportunities;**
* **make a plan, in conjunction with your supervisory team, for developing your skills to meet your academic and professional goals as part of your HDR study; and**
* **communicate with your supervisors and mentors concerning your evolving goals, skills, and development needs.**

Your IDPwill assist you to plan and develop your research, transferable, and professional skills, and to think and innovate as a professional in the development of your career objectives. It will help you to identify your strengths, see the bigger picture and maximise your potential.

The central concept of an IDP involves reflection, planning, and discussion in order to achieve your academic and professional/career goals. Setting your own goals will ensure your IDP is based on your unique skills, interests, and values.

**You should read through this *Introduction to the IDP* before you proceed with developing your own IDP.**

**Is an IDP relevant for me?**

How you use the IDP and the areas you choose to focus on will naturally depend on where you are in your individual life, academic and career journey. HDR students come to study at Charles Sturt with uniquely different experiences, skills, and employment histories and it is up to you to determine your research and career development needs. The IDP is not intended to be a ‘one-size-fits-all’ document but a guide to help you to assess and plan for your individual skills and professional development needs.

You may choose to write a plan that covers research and career goals, or just research goals. The onus is on you to:

* engage in the IDP process;
* seek advice from your supervisory team and others if appropriate;
* write and maintain your plan; and
* undertake the actions to achieve your goals.

There are many different ways to write an IDP, and the following document is but one example[[1]](#footnote-1). You should feel free to use an alternative tool if you prefer.

The IDP should ideally be revisited throughout your candidature to update and refine as goals change or come into focus, and to record progress and accomplishments.

You should begin to engage in the IDP process within the first three to six months of your candidature, and revisit your IDP on an annual basis.

Why is having an IDP important?

For most HDR students their research and academic work is just one part of a busy and demanding life. As a result, some HDR students have difficulties in managing their time, keeping their candidature on track, achieving milestones and undertaking the additional skills and training they might need over their candidature. Studies[[2]](#footnote-2) have shown that individuals who perform structured planning are more likely to meet their academic goals and also to achieve greater career success and satisfaction. Spending time on developing your IDP will help to identify and plan your goals, keep you on track for a timely completion of your project and build skills that will take you towards success in your post thesis professional life.

Recent studies[[3]](#footnote-3) have also shown that around half of all research graduates will find employment outside of academia in the industry, government and community sectors. Career planning enables you as an individual to take conscious control of your professional life by identifying career aspirations and goals, recognising and recording your skills and achievements, and prioritising and planning your professional development activities.

The following online resources and tools may also support you in writing your IDP:

* [PDP ROC](https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/professional-development-planning-for-researchers-online-course-pdp-roc) – Vitae professional development planning for researchers online course
* [myIDP](http://myidp.sciencecareers.org/) – free online tool for STEM disciplines
* [ImaginePhD](https://www.imaginephd.com/about) – free online tool for Humanities and Social Sciences

# A guide to developing your IDP

The development, implementation and revision of the IDP requires a series of steps and an ongoing discussion that should ideally be conducted between you and your supervisory team.

In order for this to be of greatest benefit for you, all parties need to participate fully in the process and it should reflect your goals and training needs. We suggest you use the following five basic steps to develop your IDP.

The five basic steps of the IDP

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| Step 1 | **Conduct a** **self-assessment/reflection** in relation to your research goals, academic writing needs and skills, and other career or personal objectives.   * Assess skills, talents, strengths and areas requiring development * Outline long-term career aims and objectives |
| Step 2 | **Survey opportunities** with your supervisor, mentor or careers advisor to:   * Identify developmental needs * Prioritise developmental areas * Identify career opportunities |
| Step 3 | **Set your goals** and revise them with input from your supervisor or mentor   * Set and prioritise short and long term goals * Define the approaches and time frame to meet your goals |
| Step 4 | **Implement the plan**   * Break larger goals into smaller plans with more detailed steps or milestones and timelines * Undertake Professional Development training and other activities according to your IDP |
| Step 5 | **Revise and update** your IDP as needed including redefining your goals as appropriate   * Send a copy of your initial IDP to graduateresearch@csu.edu.au * Develop a portfolio to record your skills and training |

**You are now ready to begin your IDP!**

**My Individual Development Plan**

Name……………………………………………………………………………………………………..Date……………………………………………………………………………

Principal Supervisor………………………………………………………………………………..

STEP 1: Conduct a self-assessment

**Start the Individual Development Plan process by taking some time to reflect on your skills.**

1. Carry out an analysis of your own experience and expertise, identifying the strengths, talents, opportunities and gaps in your development.
2. Consider and prioritise what broader expertise and experiences you may need to develop throughout your research activities, and the additional skills and expertise you may need for a career in your field of study.
3. How you use the IDP is up to you and not all areas will be relevant for you now. Your IDP is a ‘living’ document that will likely change as you move through your candidature.

Self-assessment: Research Skills

**The** [**Vitae Researcher Development Framework**](https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/about-the-vitae-researcher-development-framework) **(RDF) is a useful starting point for exploring and assessing your research skills.**

Using this framework to develop your IDP can help you to:

* Explore all the aspects of being a researcher;
* Identify your strengths and gaps in development;
* Consider the capabilities and experiences that will enhance your career prospects; and
* Prioritise areas for professional development

**The RDF is built around four ‘Domains’. You can use the table below to identify some areas of strength or skill gaps that are relevant to you.**

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| **Domain A- knowledge, intellectual abilities and techniques you will need to successfully conduct you research.**  This could include: | | |
| A1. Specialist Subject knowledge | * Research methods: theoretical * Research methods: practical * Information seeking * Information literacy and management * Languages * Academic literacy and numeracy |  |
| A2. Cognitive abilities | * Analysing * Synthesising * Critical thinking * Evaluating * Problem solving |  |
| A3. Creativity | * Inquiring mind * Intellectual insight * Innovation * Argument construction * Intellectual risk |  |
| **Domain B- personal qualities and approach to be an effective researcher.**  This could include: | | |
| B1. Personal qualities | * Enthusiasm * Perseverance * Integrity * Self-confidence * Self-reflection * Responsibility |  |
| B2. Self-management | * Preparation and prioritisation * Commitment to research * Time management * Responsiveness to change * Work-life balance |  |
| B3. Professional & career development | * Career management * Continuing professional development * Responsiveness to opportunities * Networking * Reputation and esteem |  |
| **Domain C- knowledge of research governance and professional standard.**  These could include: | | |
| C1. Professional conduct | * Health and safety * Ethics, principles and sustainability * Legal requirements * Intellectual Property Rights and copyright * Respect and confidentiality * Attribution and co-authorship * Appropriate practice |  |
| C2. Research Management | * Research strategy * Project planning and delivery * Risk management |  |
| C3. Finance, funding and resources | * Income and funding generation * Financial management * Infrastructure and resources |  |
| **Domain D- knowledge and skills to engage and work with others and ensure the wider impact of you research.**  These could include: | | |
| D1. Working with others | * Collegiality * Team working * People management * Supervision * Mentoring * Influence and leadership * Collaboration * Equality and diversity |  |
| C2. Communication and dissemination | * Communication methods * Communication media * Publication |  |
| C3. Engagement and impact | * Teaching * Public engagement * Enterprise * Policy * Society and culture * Global citizenship |  |

CSU is a member organisation of [Vitae](https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/about-the-vitae-researcher-development-framework), and you can access all the member-only resources on the Vitae website by registering with your @CSU email address. You can also download the full RDF for free or use the online RDF Planner with a subscription.

Self-assessment: Research program requirements

**As part of the self-assessment process, you should also ask yourself some questions related to your current research program. Doing so will lead you to actions or goals to incorporate into your plan. Your aim is to develop skills that will lead to success in your candidature.**

What are your research project goals or milestones you must meet during the next year? Over the course of your candidature?

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Are there particular research skills, technical skills, professional training or discipline-specific knowledge that you need to develop?

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Are there scholarly activities you would like to accomplish or work toward during the next year? Over the time of your candidature?

(Examples: join a professional organization, present at a conference, co-author a paper)

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Do you expect to encounter any particular obstacles to achieving your research aims? What might you do to overcome these obstacles?

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Comments:

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Self-assessment: Career aspirations

**In creating an Individual Development Plan, you may also ask yourself some questions related to your career goals.**

It is important that you think carefully about your individual career goals and the skills that you need to be successful in that career. It is quite likely that your career success will require a much wider range of skills than the ability to design and perform research. If you are, as yet, unsure about the career direction you would like to take once you graduate you may find it helpful to discuss this with you supervisor or with a careers mentor from [CSU Careers Services](https://student.csu.edu.au/services-support/careers).

In what profession do you wish to be employed? What particular career would you like to pursue?

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What are your short-term and long-term career goals? How do you aim to achieve these goals and aspirations?

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What competencies are required for your chosen career?

Examples of these might be: Functional skills- specific technical skills or occupational knowledge; Personal attributes- communication, team focus, adaptability; or Leadership- strategic thinking, project or resource management.

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How well do your current skills match the competencies required for your chosen career?

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What are your next steps in exploring your career options?

(Examples: learn about science writing, conduct informational interviews, find out where graduates in my field are working/finding careers, developing contacts and networks…)

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Are there any opportunities or obstacles to starting a job search? What will you need to do to overcome these obstacles?

(Examples: visa issues, ability to move to a different area)

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STEP 2: Survey your opportunities

Development opportunities

**Opportunities to develop your skills and knowledge may include but are not limited to academic writing and research skills workshops, an industry placement, internal courses offered by the University, external courses, or experiential activities[[4]](#footnote-4).**

To help you find development opportunities we have collected all of our research skills and career development resources into one online site for **[Research Skills and Career Development.](https://research.csu.edu.au/research-support/current-research-students)**

Use the links below to become familiar with the various opportunities offered through Charles Sturtand beyond.

* **Research Professional Development calendar** - <https://research.csu.edu.au/research-support/professional-development/calendar>

The Research PD calendar is where you can find information about and book in to over 100 different professional and research skill development opportunities. These range from support with academic writing to presenting your research at a conference, specific software training, Library and referencing support, research design and much more!

* **Experiential Activities** – there are many valuable experiential activities that will help you to grow as a researcher and help you to develop your transferable skills. e.g. Conferences, research groups, publications. A comprehensive catalogue of these activities is available [here](https://research.csu.edu.au/research-support/current-research-students/Research-Skills-and-Career-Development/cards/other-experiential-activities/experiential-activities). You should be guided in the number of experiential activities (e.g. conference attendance) you plan to undertake by any policies within your Faculty.
* **Industry placements and Internships**- You can find out more about opportunities to develop your skills in industry or the workplace.

APR Internships: <https://aprintern.org.au/>

Voluntary Workplace Learning: <http://student.csu.edu.au/services-support/careers/employability/workplace-learning>

* **Online courses**: There are free online learning programs that will help you to build your transferable skills as you work through your candidature. You can check them out at these links.

<https://www.csu.edu.au/division/dit/services/software/linkedin-learning>

<https://oeru.org/courses/>

<https://www.openlearning.com/csu>

Career opportunities

**You can involve your supervisor or another mentor to help you define your career interests or to survey the various job opportunities in different employment sectors in your discipline (e.g. academia, industry, non-profit, government, or other research-related areas).**

**CSU Careers Services** also provide individual career mentoring and consultation that you may find helpful. You can contact them to make an appointment- <https://student.csu.edu.au/services-support/careers>

**PostAC** is a learning platform that helps you explore your post PhD employment options.80% of the job ads suitable for researchers do not contain the keyword ‘PhD’, which means the jobs that call for your research skills are largely hidden in conventional search engines like Seek. PostAc contains tens of thousands of recent jobs posted by non-academic employers looking for a person with highly developed research skills.

You can log in and make an account using your csu.edu.au address. There is some learning material to assist your explorations and some stories of successful career transitions to inspire you. Go to [www.postac.com.au](http://www.postac.com.au) to explore your job opportunities. Type in your research interests into the search box and use the ‘more jobs like this’ button to refine your search until you find a job you would like to do in the future. Use the skills highlighted at the top of the job ad text to inform your plan.

The following resources may also be helpful for scoping the broad range of careers that graduate researchers pursue:

* What do researchers do? - [www.vitae.ac.uk/wdrd](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/wdrd)
* Uni Jobs - <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/unijobs/en-au/listings/australia/>
* Graduate Careers Australia - <http://www.graduatecareers.com.au/>
* Research Career - <http://www.researchcareer.com.au/>
* National Postdoctoral Association - <https://www.nationalpostdoc.org/>

STEP 3: Set your IDP Goals

**Now you should set and prioritise your short and long-term goals and strategies in the tables provided, then find opportunities for development and begin achieving your goals!**

The IDP helps you map out the path you may choose to take toward achieving your aims and objectives. The goals you include in your IDP should be based on your skill strengths and gaps, research requirements, and career aspirations that you identified in Step 1, together with the milestone activities that mark successful progress through your research program, plus any other specific skills and knowledge needed to prepare for your career that you identified in Step 2. The EXACT[[5]](#footnote-5) goal-setting model described below can also be a useful guide to help you to set your goals.

**The EXACT model for goal-setting**

There are various goal-setting models available, and you may already be familiar with the SMART model (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-based) which was designed for use by people who set goals for others (e.g. line-managers and team leaders). Here we introduce an alternative - the EXACT model - which is more beneficial for people who are setting goals for themselves. The model identifies five dimensions to consider when articulating your goals and actions:

**E**xplicit- your objectives should be clear, concise and have a single focus

E**X**citing- they should also be positive and inspiring

**A**ssessable-define how you will know you have achieved your goal

**C**hallenging- don’t be afraid to be ambitious and aim high

**T**ime-framed- set yourself deadlines and prioritise your goals

Step 4: Write your IDP goals and action plan

Research skills and project goals

**In planning the development of your research skills and project goals define objectives, actions and outcomes in the table below.**

Include a timeframe for beginning and completing these actions. Make sure to have an outcome statement that is clear enough to allow someone (including you!) to know if you’ve met your objective. You can also use the four Vitae Researcher Development Framework Domains (see p.4-5) to make sure you are covering all aspects of your professional development.

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| **Objectives/skills/competencies to be learned** | **Action Plans** | **Timeframe** | **Priority** | **Outcomes** | **Vitae Domain** |
| Example 1:  Managing literature and references | Book in to take an Endnote course | 1-3 months |  | Setting up my Endnote Library | A1 |
| Example 2:  Statistical software for my data analysis | Book in to course with QCU | 12-18 months |  | Identified statistical software most suited to my research project | A1 |
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Transferable skills and career goals

**In planning for the development of your transferable and career skills and goals define approaches and strategies in the table below. Include a timeframe for beginning and completing these actions.** Make sure to have an outcome statement that is clear enough to allow someone (including you!) to know if you’ve met your objective. You can also use the Vitae Career Development Framework domains to make sure you are covering all aspects of your professional development.

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| **Objectives/skills/competencies to be learned** | **Action Plans** | **Timeframe** | **Priority** | **Outcomes** | **Vitae Domain** |
| Example 1:  Time management and staying on track | Book in for ‘Audit Your Time’ and ‘Overcoming Procrastination’ | 6-12 months |  | Become more effective at managing my time and meeting my goals | B2 |
| Example 2:  Get industry work experience in my field | Look for opportunities for internships or industry placements | After submission/examination period |  | 12 week industry placement | D3 |
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Step 5: Revise and update your IDP

**Your IDP should be a living document that you revise regularly and update as needed including redefining your goals.**

It can also be a great way for you to plan ahead and manage your research project, to see the progress you are making and the goals you are achieving.

We recommend you:

* set regular dates (every 6-12 months is recommended) to review and update your plan;
* discuss any changes or additions with your supervisor;
* record the research training or experiential activities you undertake as part of your skills portfolio and/or CV (you may find a web-based program like [Pebblepad](https://www.csu.edu.au/division/learning-and-teaching/interact2_help/teaching-and-professional-staff/tools-to-engage-students/pebblepad) useful for this); and
* submit a completed version of your IDP to [graduateresearch@csu.edu.au](mailto:graduateresearch@csu.edu.au)  - it will be held on file by the Research Office.  You can access and revised a copy of this completed document at any time.  It will also be available to your Principal Supervisor, Sub-Dean Graduate Studies and Research Office staff.

1. This IDP tool has been adapted from the following sources:

   <https://grad.wisc.edu/professional-development/individual-development-plan/>

   <http://www.faseb.org/portals/2/pdfs/opa/idp.pdf>

   <https://sop.washington.edu/wp-content/uploads/Individual-Development-Plan_Pharmaceutics-2018-2019.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Davis G. (2009). ‘Improving the Post-doctoral Experience: An empirical approach’, in Richard B. Freeman and Daniel L. Goroff, (eds). *Science and Engineering Careers in the United States: An Analysis of*

   *Markets and Employment.* p. 99-127, University of Chicago Press. Chicago

   Gollwitzer P. M. (1999). Implementation intentions: strong effects of simple plans. *American Psychologist*, 54, 493-503

   Hobin et al. (2014). ‘Putting PhDs to Work: career planning for today’s scientist’, *CBE- Life Sciences Education, 13,* Spring*.* 49-53

   Vanderford et al. (2018). A cross-sectional study of the use and effectiveness of the Individual Development Plan among doctoral students. *F1000Research.* 7:722 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Griffith University *Research Graduate Outcomes* https://www.griffith.edu.au/griffith-graduate-research-school/hdr-outcomes [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Most of these will be available to you for free at Charles Sturt but some for external courses and experiential activities there may be associated costs. You should discuss these with your Supervisor as you may be able to apply for grants or funding support subject to usual university policy and assessed and allocated through the usual processes. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Source: https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/professional-development-planning-for-researchers-online-course-pdp-roc/plan-and-achieve-your-professional-development-goals

   NOTE: You will need to register with Vitae using your CSU email address in order to access this site. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)