

Some Advice about Writing ADP Applications

These guidelines draw on previous applications and information sessions run each year by the Office of Human Resources. The contents are designed as ‘advice’ and are not meant to guarantee success. ADP is a competitive process and other factors can determine the outcome, for example, the number of applicants from the same academic unit.

The examples are limited because it is not appropriate to provide complete, previous applications. Each ADP application is distinct and individual – the ideas in these guidelines are intended as prompts as you are writing/reviewing your own application.

What makes a strong ADP application?

A strong application takes time to prepare. It is advisable to commence planning and drafting ideas well in advance as you may need to obtain email support from an overseas institution, or develop a robust collaborative research proposal with colleagues at another institution, or identify critical field work and need to get permission to carry it out. The most successful applications have the following characteristics:

- ✓ Clear, convincing and straightforward
- ✓ Relevant to strategic directions
- ✓ Have clearly outlined and achievable outcomes
- ✓ Provide sufficient detail to show thoughtfulness in preparation
- ✓ Have a realistic budget and timelines
- ✓ Show strong support from your Dean/Director

It is important to proof-read your final application, as poor editing does not help when trying to make a convincing case. On occasion, the ADP Committee may ask an applicant to clarify or re-work an aspect of their ADP application. Examples of further information required might include:

1. *Details of the two articles and the journals in which they are to be published to be provided to the Dean/Director.*
2. *Additional information confirming that the program will be used to maximum extent possible to enhance future research activities.*

The following guidelines look at **re-worked examples** (in italics) from past ADP applications to highlight particular points that may help you when writing your application. The guidelines provide examples from the different sections of the application. They are taken from a wide range of previous applications across many years, and represent applications ranging from early career researchers to experienced researchers.

The section numbers relate to the section numbers on the ADP Application Template. The guidelines only provide advice. Each completed ADP application contains substantial detail that cannot be fully represented through brief examples. The preliminary sections (1 – 4) on the template are for factual information. **Sections 5 – 7** are the focus of these guidelines. It is important to keep within the word limit of **5 pages** for Sections 5 – 7. An effective and convincing application is typically clear, concise and well-argued, without excessive amounts of detailed information.

5. Your program objectives (ie what are you going to do?)

It is helpful to start Section 5 with a brief summary of your proposed program, outlining why it should be undertaken as ADP.

Summary – clear and straightforward, but brief

The purpose of my ADP program is primarily in order to undertake essential historical field work research in China. The publication that will be the primary outcome of this ADP research project will greatly enhance my scholarly reputation and will enhance the research profile of the University.

This is a very brief summary but it sets out clearly the primary purpose of the ADP, and relates this research to both personal reputation and the research profile of the University. It is a little vague and would benefit from more detail up front. It is important that the summary (just as in the Abstract for a journal article) is clear and concise but at the same time conveys the depth and planning in the rest of the application. The 5-page limit of sections 5 – 7 means that the length of each section must be carefully considered.

Summary – strong and clear

The primary objective of my proposed Academic Development Program (ADP) is to undertake field research in the U.S. and U.K. as part of the next phase of my research into XXXXXXXXXXXXX. A secondary objective is to develop networks in the U.K., U.S.A. and Europe to identify participants for future external grant applications that will be made during 2012-2013. I will also be spending part of the ADP in writing three papers to be submitted to high-quality international journals (target journals are XXXXXXXXX and Academy of XXXXXXX Review). The outcomes that will result from my field research undertaken during my ADP will contribute to enhancing the research profile of the School of XXXXXXXX and the University in the area of sustainability and climate change which are priority research areas for the School and the University as well as a National Research Priority.

This summary is from a more experienced researcher and identifies very clear aims and outcomes for the ADP period. It links the program to a specific research direction, and also identifies the aim to establish relationships for future research projects. The publishable outcomes are clearly stated and specific journals mentioned (although these details could have been left until section 7). The alignment with strategic goals is clearly identified. This is a very succinct summary.

Summary – clear and concise

The objectives of ADP will be to:

- *Conduct a systematic literature review project*
- *Complete data collection and data analysis of project based on postgraduate students*
- *Write and submit publications based on 4 projects*
- *Present research findings to 2 international conferences*

This list clearly sets out what work will be done and what outcomes will be achieved. In order to make it easy for the Committee to review, the objectives were set out as dot points, each of which will have to be explained in more detail in Sections 5 – 7.

Summary – early career researcher

The key goal of this proposed Academic Development Program is to improve my standing as a newly established researcher. The proposed ADP program is about taking the opportunity at this point in my professional development to focus upon research, to consolidate and build upon a record of achievement in publications, conference presentations and research project development, and to develop and enhance my research competencies, through work on two specific research projects linked to the goals of the School and in particular the research area of XXXXXXXX.

Some researchers explain their level of research experience because this helps the Committee members manage their expectations. In this example, the researcher has clearly identified himself/herself as an early career researcher. The ADP Committee is keen to see researchers from different levels of experience to undertake ADP. This researcher wants to consolidate recent research and work on two research projects (which are described in more detail within the application) which are strategically aligned.

Summary – weak and vague

There is considerable interest in new approaches to developing computational analyses of biological molecules, including those that contribute to photosynthesis, flower pigments and potential new colours for food products. These would replace artificial colours that are being phased out for regulatory reasons. An ADP program spent with leading researchers in Australia and overseas would help me to identify new theoretical approaches, potentially leading to a number of research publications, and enhancing my undergraduate teaching. Other work in this ADP would relate to the development of new materials.

Comments by the author of this example (based on his own research area).

- ▶ The first sentence reads as if it has been cut-and-pasted from a grant proposal or journal paper.
- ▶ The phrase “computational analyses of biological molecules” is jargon that needs to be explained to the reader.
- ▶ The phrase “photosynthesis, flower pigments and potential new colours for food products” is very broad and vague, suggesting that the program of research lacks focus, and the applicant is trying to sound impressive.
- ▶ Who are the “leading researchers”, where are they based, and how would the applicant collaborate with them?
- ▶ The statement “would help me to identify new theoretical approaches” suggests that the author does not have a clear plan. A better approach would be to identify new theoretical approaches (from the literature) before applying, and use the ADP program to test these approaches on some well-defined research questions.
- ▶ The phrase “potentially leading to a number of research publications” is unsatisfactory for several reasons. In this context “potentially” is a “weasel word”; “a number” could include zero; “research publications” needs explanation, preferably including suggested journals in Section 7.
- ▶ What does the applicant mean by “enhancing my undergraduate teaching”? This statement is very vague.
- ▶ The final sentence sounds like an add-on that is intended to add weight to an application that the applicant knows to be weak.

Summary – needs sharpening up

The objectives of the ADP are to generate more publications and strengthen the link of our university with XXXX universities and XXXXX university. My ADP program is aligned with the goals and strategies of the University and the School of XXXXX. One of the focuses of these goals is to enhance our research profile. My research project will lead to conference papers and a possible publication in refereed journal. The results of the study will help the School of XXXXX achieve its goals.

This summary is quite general with not enough detail. It is not enough to just state that there will be conference papers and possible journal publications. It is preferable to show that serious consideration has been given to which conference is most relevant, for example:

- *I will prepare and present a paper on workplace issues at the International Social Work Conference in October, 2XXX.*

The same applies to journal or book publications, for example:

- *I will complete the co-editing of a book on aged care, to be published by Jones Publishing, UK, with a team of international experts in this area (see co-editor CV in Appendix).*
- *This ADP will be used to work on the write-up and submission of a book manuscript under contract with a leading academic publisher (Appendix: see correspondence from Cambridge University Press). This will promote Objective X.X in the School's Research Plan 2013-2015 by developing targeted world-class research in European Studies/History, and is thereby likely to improve the school's ERA performance.*

Unsubstantiated claims about possible books will not be considered without details and preferably an email from the publishing company. Normally the Committee will wish to see evidence of a book contract. It is preferable to show how the ADP work is aligned with specific strategic goals (also see sections 6 and 7 below).

6. How and where are you going to do it, and with whom?

This section should include details of the proposed program.

The following activities will be conducted during the proposed ADP:

Meeting with NHMRC research partners: *[explains purpose in one paragraph]*

Undertaking field research: *[explains what sort of data collection and who the stakeholders are in next paragraph]*

Visit to University XXXXX *[to discuss.....in final paragraph]*

or

Meeting with ARC Discovery partners: *[explains purpose of meeting is to discuss project, provide updates and look at extending the project to additional countries. The group will also work on draft grant applications for further funding.]*

[Please note clause (14) of the *Academic Development Program Procedures*, “Applications that include work on ongoing research grant projects must outline the nature of the work to be undertaken, details of the funding body and award, and details of the funds that will be utilised from the research grant.”

Field research in Germany: *[data collection information is provided including who the participants will be.]*

Visit to XXX University, London: *[explains that this visit will also aim to develop a new research project and ties in this particular topic to the research interests of the School.]*

These two examples illustrate how applicants have identified stages or different activities for their ADP. They sometimes list them separately and explain each component in more detail. This section should contain details about places, names of collaborators, and details about purpose and type of each activity. It refers to expected outcomes from current projects and shows a plan to start preparing for future research projects.

Clearly outline your justification as to why you have selected the place/project/participants/outcomes for your proposed program.

Some examples include:

Researchers from the University of XXXX are partner investigators in my ARC Discovery project and I need to consult with them about the project. Whilst working in Berlin, I will be able to develop plans to discuss our interests in XXXX and develop plans for a new collaborative funded research project. Sydney University has been selected as it will provide a convenient location away from the University to allow me to complete the tasks set out. It has an extensive library, and will provide me with the facilities to achieve my goals.

7. What are the specific outcomes and outputs of what you plan to achieve and how will they benefit both yourself and the University – sample statements

The table below gives examples of the sorts of outcomes that an applicant can refer to. Of course these need to be fleshed out a little.

The primary outcome of the proposed ADP will be a high quality publication refer to discussions with Cambridge University Press.

My track record shows that I do deliver [and gives examples.]

This outcome will also be of benefit to the University because it will contribute to the achieving of its goals/plans and research profile.

It will also benefit the national and international communities because of its production of new and highly relevant knowledge.

Furthermore it will enhance the University's role within the National Centre for Research in XXXXX and consolidate the expertise that the School contributes to the associated degree program.

In addition the proposed ADP project will have the enhancement and enrichment of international linkages with key academic institutions in XXXXX as a major outcome.

Enhancement of my teaching will also be an important outcome [and explains contribution to particular undergraduate or postgraduate units.]

Expected outcomes – using tables or lists to differentiate

Sometimes applicants find it easier to present two or three different ADP activities by either numbering them, or identifying them in a table to make the outcomes clearer. This example clearly shows the different activities and outcomes for each section.

Research Project	Activity during ADP	Expected Outcome
Discipline-based research study	Title of research paper from study	Manuscript to be submitted to Journal of Advanced XXXX May 2015
Teaching related study	Data collection by end of March 2009; evaluation and preparation of findings	Paper presented at XXXX Research Congress Mexico (dates) Paper submitted to Journal of XXXX October 2015

Expected outcomes – a more clearly defined statement needed

The template states that outcomes will be assessed in terms of value to the University etc., and the applicant needs to demonstrate how these outcomes will be achieved. This requires some specific information to show that thoughtful consideration has gone into the planning.

1. *First my ADP will strengthen and establish new links with overseas universities. See attached documents for the confirmation of visiting arrangements.*
2. *Research paper. I have already done most of the data collection and data analyses. Most importantly I have developed the research model. I have presented the model in several conferences and research seminars, such as XXXXXXXXXXXX. I expect completion of two refereed conference papers (names conferences). Also I intend to work towards a publication of one paper in a refereed journal.*

The first example is weak in identifying outcomes. Links with an overseas university are often strategically determined and are usually identified by Western Sydney International and/or specific School/University Research Institute links. The second example lists work already completed, so implies that two conference papers might be the main outcome, with work towards a refereed journal article. The journal is not identified, and there are no other outcomes, such as contribution to teaching content for a specific unit or program, or development towards future research grants or collaborations.

Expected outcomes – can sometimes be unrealistic

Outcomes need to be achievable. Sometimes an applicant’s track record will help convince a Committee that the outcomes are realistic; however if the Committee feels that an unachievable set of outcomes have been stated then they may advise the applicant to review them.

- *Significant work towards book publication*
- *3 articles submitted to high ranking Journals*
- *Paper presented at International conference*
- *10 visits to research sites whilst overseas*
- *Professional development resources developed out of research project*

This example sets out a range of outcomes, all of which sound relevant. However, to make substantial progress on a book publication, submit three articles, present at an international conference and visit a large number of research sites as well as prepare resources appears to be aiming too high and the result may well be that many of the outcomes are not achieved. It is a delicate balance to set achievable outcomes and convince the Committee that the outcomes are sufficient for 22 weeks of ADP. Getting advice from a senior academic in your School or Institute can be helpful in determining appropriate outcomes. You will be required to write a report after your ADP and you will be asked whether you met your stated outcomes. It is appropriate that these may have changed slightly since writing the application (if changed substantially you are required to notify your Dean/Director of the changes).

Strategic links and benefits

In this section you are required to show how your program is aligned with the strategic directions of the University/Division and School/Research Institute. The following statements are examples of the specific ways that alignment is indicated in different applications.

- ▶ *These activities will contribute to the Research Plan for the School /Institute (explain in more detail).*
- ▶ *A publication in this area will also assist in increasing the outcomes for the XXXX research cluster in XXXX of which I am a member.*
- ▶ *ADP will assist me to develop a strong track record and hence increase my competitiveness in obtaining ARC funding. [Make sure that this is a realistic expectation.]*
- ▶ *Achievement of research funding will contribute to School /Institute goals in this area (and cite them...).*

Prepared by

Associate Professor Janne Malfroy

Associate Professor Paul Wormell

11 September 2012, Revised 6 March 2014 and 16 January 2017