

PhD and Masters by research students on ACIAR projects

Improving integration of postgraduate students on ACIAR projects can benefit the students themselves, research teams, partner countries, and ACIAR. This guidance aims to support Project Leaders (PL) and ACIAR's Research Program Managers (RPM) more clearly articulate a student's role whilst setting out the risks.

ACIAR acknowledges PhD and Masters by Research students are involved in ACIAR projects. Students are enrolled in both Australian universities or partner country universities. This includes students outside ACIAR's formal scholarship programs. Between 2006-2009, ACIAR maintained a postgraduate student register. The 227 students awarded PhD or Masters was three times the number of students funded under the JAF.

ACIAR's formal scholarship programs for overseas students includes the John Allright Fellowship for individuals (who have recently worked on an ACIAR project) to study in Australia. For over ten years ACIAR has provided scholarships at University of South Pacific and more recently at Fiji National University. Under ACIAR's Pacific Agriculture Support Scholarship Program students are aligned to an ACIAR project and Australian co-supervisor to study in Fiji or Samoa. These programs are advertised annually.

Statement	Detail
Students need the space to learn, and the type of work they do is important.	<p>Students need the freedom to learn the broad range of skills of a scientist - from design to publication. Furthermore, as students are learning, some may deliver low-quality research or cease their studies. Therefore, students should not be considered project "staff" and should be detailed as post-graduate students in the capacity-building section of the project proposal. The student and their research topic should be included in annual reports and detailed in the final report.</p> <p>When proposing a student to work on a project, we would like the potential supervisors to use the industry-based PhD/masters model. The researchable problem is presented to the candidate, and the industry partner might reduce the scope of research responses considered. Within that model, there are plenty of opportunities to learn the research skills of an independent thinker and researcher (soft skills as well as the hard). It is fine if the student project is tied to the milestones of the PhD/masters milestones used by the University to track students' progress.</p>
Students should not be perceived as cheap labour for projects.	PLs should not seek to target students as a cheaper replacement for the fully qualified post-doctoral staff or technical staff, where available. ACIAR is willing to fund staff allocations according to the best people for the job.
A cohort of students may provide better outcomes in some cases.	In some cases, embedding one student on a project may not be the best option. There may be benefits from a cohort of 3-4 students. The rationale for this decision needs to be explained in project documents. No matter what the number of students on a project, it is also important for PLs to closely manage the expectations and perceptions of students by partner agencies and researchers.

Projects with multiple Australian students attached to them can give the perception to partner agencies that the capacity building benefit is primarily for Australia.	<p>It is essential that if an Australian student is to be attached to an ACIAR project, partner country agencies (not just the partner researchers) are fully briefed and any questions or concerns clarified (e.g. data collection, data ownership, welfare issues, research permits, ethics approvals).</p> <p>Projects with multiple Australian students would not be a usual model that ACIAR would endorse. In cases where the PL thinks this is necessary and this perception can be managed, they must provide a justification to the RPM, and have agreement from the partner country that this is the best course of action.</p>
PLs must closely monitor and manage the students in-country.	As students will be operating in cross-cultural environments about which they may be unfamiliar, misunderstandings may occur. It is the responsibility of the PL to keep a close eye on relations with the partner agencies and to manage any issues that arise, including communicating with ACIAR's Country Offices if required.
Supervision of students needs to involve the project team.	In most circumstances, students should be co-supervised by Australian academics <i>and</i> academics in our partner countries. Furthermore, there are sometimes additional supervisors from outside the project team who have their own opinions about what work needs to take place. All supervisors need to agree on the role the student will take on the project, and this should be added to the project documentation (see reporting below). Importantly, given the location for the students is often remote from all supervisors, at least one must be appointed to monitor the student regularly.
Sources of funding (both ACIAR and other sources) for stipend and operating expenses going to students should be clearly articulated in the project documentation. Our preference is for ACIAR funds not to be used to support students.	<p>It is preferred that ACIAR project funds are not used to support students on research projects, outside of the formal fellowship schemes. However, in some cases operating and stipend funds to support students may be provided from ACIAR project budgets if detailed in the project documentation and approved by the RPM. Ideally, the student's role should be outlined at the initial project proposal stage as the project is discussed at IHR (however it is fine if a person cannot be named at that stage).</p> <p>We encourage PLs to use the ACIAR project development process to leverage funds from Universities to support student projects. Especially to cover fees for international students at Australian Universities and stipends. This can be documented as an in-kind cash contribution by the partner organisation in the ACIAR budget spreadsheet. Funds going to the student for operating expenses could then be justified/explained in the project proposal document.</p>
Students need to be included in the project documentation. Both the full proposal document, annual reports and final reports.	Any student involved in an ACIAR project (i.e. students using project resources such as funds, access to sites, partner organisation facilities or staff, staff to help with field work, project IP, databases or genetic material, data or samples collected by the project team etc.) should be listed in the annual reports and final report. The minimum details required are student name (may not be available until later in project cycle), University they are enrolled at, degree, start date, expected end date, title/topic area, supervisors' names, funding sources (ACIAR and others). In the final report a more detailed explanation of what they found, or the citations for papers or thesis document should be included.

PLs remain responsible for all the activities listed in the project documentation.	Care should be taken if the PL decides that a student will be responsible for delivering (fully or partly) specific activities in the project proposal document. If a student fails to deliver work (or delivers to a low standard) contracted by ACIAR to the Commissioned Organisation, the PL is still responsible for the deliverable as listed in the activity table.
Ethics approvals for student work needs to be considered.	Regardless of who funds the student, if they are involved/aligned to an ACIAR project they will be interacting with project staff, farmers, and other stakeholders. They will be using partners' resources and facilities. Therefore, they need to have adequate ethics approvals for their research activities and formal acknowledgment and support from the partner agency - especially for research involving surveys on people and experiments with vertebrate animals. Ethics approvals are usually the responsibility of the commissioned organisation.
Student research findings need to be understood by the project team.	If the student's work is specified as part of the project deliverables the progress and findings of any student's research need to be communicated regularly with all project staff (both Australian and in-country). If needed, the thesis can be partly or fully translated into another language and seminars held to explain the findings to the team. If this occurs after the student has finished their study, then the PL should take on this task. Their findings need to be included in annual reports and final reports.
Co-authorship of papers may need to involve partners outside the supervisory team.	Students must make a significant contribution to the write-up of their research and publish their findings. If partners on the project have made contributions to papers, they should be included as co-authors. These conversations need to take place at the start but also throughout the research phase (not right at the end). In cases where co-authorship is not warranted, then credit for contributions of others should still be made via the acknowledgment section of the manuscript.