This document sets out the criteria that the Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF) uses to assess and rank postgraduate research student applications.

Places in the ISF postgraduate program are limited, highly sought after, and highly competitive. Transparent processes\(^1\) are needed to assess and rank applicants in order to make offers of placements and scholarships.

In 2011, the Faculty Board of the Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF) introduced an innovative process to meet this need: a well-specified qualitative (i.e. not numerical scoring) assessment process that takes account of career stage, and considers both quality and impact. It comprises four equally weighted criteria that have been carefully chosen to span a breadth of professional and academic experiences and potentials:

1. Professional Experience - strength & relevance relative to the candidate's opportunities (impact)
2. Research Output (quality and impact)
3. Research Proposal (quality)
4. Academic Merit (quality)

Please note that these criteria complement and extend the requirements in UTS’ Application for Admission and Scholarship HDR Form, last updated 22/06/12. ‘Professional Experience’ and ‘Research Output’ relate to Section 8 Relevant Research and Professional Experience; ‘Research Proposal’ relates to Section 5 Proposed Research Project/Topic, and ‘Academic Merit’ relates to Section 6 Academic Qualifications. Applicants should follow the advice in the UTS application form and the accompanying guidelines for documentation requirements, in order to avoid duplicating effort if their ISF application is successful.

**PRIOR TO APPLYING TO UTS, APPLICANTS NEED TO APPLY TO ISF. ONLY THOSE APPLICANTS SUCCESSFUL THROUGH THE ISF PROCESS ARE INVITED TO APPLY TO UTS.**

**ISF APPLICANTS SHOULD PREPARE A DOCUMENT ENTITLED ‘APPLICATION FOR ADMISSION TO ISF’**

**ISF STUDENTS WHO ARE ALREADY ENROLLED AND ARE SEEKING A SCHOLARSHIP MUST ALSO APPLY THROUGH THIS PROCESS.**

Faculty Board members will see only the document you prepare, so it is in your interests to make it comprehensive.

The Faculty Board will review all applications, and together agree on the assessment and ranking of applicants.

Where necessary, interviews will be used to extend the information available to the Board e.g. to distinguish between applicants ranked equally on the above criteria.

\(^1\) Whilst scoring has always occurred at a Faculty level, the scoring system has, until 2011, been centrally determined i.e., historically there has been a single numerical scoring system across UTS. In 2011, the Graduate School Board agreed on a new arrangement: all postgraduate research student applications are now assessed and ranked at the Faculty level by a Faculty-determined process. For the purposes of administering its postgraduate program, ISF is a Faculty.
Your application document should include the following administrative information:

a. Your name  
b. Name/s of supervisor/s  
c. Country/ies of citizenship  
d. What course you want to enroll in (Masters or PhD)  
e. Whether you plan to be full-time (minimum 35 hr/wk) or part-time (minimum 20hr/wk)  
f. What support you require to undertake your studies. There are two kinds of costs: fees and living allowance or stipend:
   i. All enrolments have course fees. All successful Australian students will qualify for Research Training Scheme (RTS) place. International students must pay fees, and should indicate whether a fee waiver (called IRS) is required from UTS or whether you have support from elsewhere e.g. scholarship from your home country  
   ii. Whether a living allowance scholarship is required. Doing a research degree is a full-time job. You must have adequate financial support to enable you to focus on your studies.

You should then specifically address each of the four criteria set out below.

You should include a CV with your ISF application.

1. PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE (IMPACT): STRENGTH AND RELEVANCE

Professional experience is primarily about the demonstrated impact of an applicant’s work to date. The term ‘professional experience’ should be interpreted broadly, for example it may include both paid employment and volunteer roles. The strength of the professional experience will be assessed relative to the candidate’s opportunities, including stage of career. The relevance of the professional experience will be assessed relative to the applicant’s proposed field of study.

Applicants should give details of their professional experience in their CV as per the UTS application form requirements and make a case for its strength and relevance in their ISF application document.

2. RESEARCH OUTPUT (QUALITY AND IMPACT)

Research outputs will be assessed on their quality and impact relative to the candidate’s opportunity. Research outputs include publications (e.g. research reports, contributions to industry publications, conference papers, academic journal papers, etc), and presentations (e.g. seminars, conferences, digital media, etc).

Applicants should include documentation of their research outputs as required by the UTS application form. In their ISF application document, applicants should make clear their role in the research behind and the production of the outputs, because research is very often a team affair. Applicants should consider and respond to the dimensions below in making a case for the quality and impact of their outputs.

Quality will be assessed according to

i. the quality of the contribution, using our critical thinking scale (see Appendix), and with reference to the University of Adelaide’s Research Skills Development Framework – see
Generally, successful ISF applicants will be expected to demonstrate ‘good’ to ‘excellent’ critical thinking skills, and Level IV or V research skills.

ii. the quality of the location of the contribution e.g., the standing of the publication, conference, etc.

The impact of the research outputs will be assessed by considering what has changed as a result of releasing the research output. For example, how was the output received by in the organisation/sector/field; to what extent has it been taken up in the organisation/sector/field, cited by others, adopted in practice, etc.

3. RESEARCH PROPOSAL (QUALITY)

Guidelines for an ISF Research Proposal have been separately prepared, and are included in the Appendix for ease of reference. Applicants should include their Research Proposal within their application document. The quality of the Research Proposal will be assessed using our critical thinking scale (see Appendix) and the University of Adelaide’s Research Skills Development Framework – see above for links. Applicants should include a research proposal as a section within their ‘Response to ISF Assessment Criteria’.

4. ACADEMIC MERIT (QUALITY)

Academic merit will be assessed on

i. the extent of successfully completed studies (e.g., Bachelor’s degree, Honours degree, Masters undertaken largely by coursework, Masters undertaken largely by research, etc

ii. the demonstrated and verified level of attainment in those studies

Applicants should follow the guidance in the UTS application form for documentation of academic qualifications, and include that documentation with their application. Applicants should provide information in response to this criteria in their ISF application document. It may be helpful for applicants to include additional guidance for assessors on interpreting the extent and level of their academic achievements.
CRITICAL THINKING ASSESSMENT FRAME

This frame has been adapted from material gleaned in pre-internet days from something that was then called the Centre for Critical Thinking in the USA. It provides a useful starting point for assessing Research Outputs and Outlines of Intended Research developed by prospective research students at ISF. Generally, candidates should demonstrate 'good' or 'excellent' critical thinking skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Sound</th>
<th>Shaky</th>
<th>Poor</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clear</td>
<td>Mixed thinking and performance</td>
<td>Acquisition of knowledge by memorising rather</td>
<td>Acquisition of knowledge by memorising rather</td>
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<tr>
<td>Well-reasoned</td>
<td>Inconsistently clear, precise and well-reasoned</td>
<td>than comprehension</td>
<td>than comprehension</td>
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<tr>
<td>Insightful</td>
<td>Doesn't display depth of insight.</td>
<td>Thinking is typically unclear,</td>
<td>Regularly unclear, imprecise and poorly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-evaluation evident</td>
<td>Inconsistent comprehension of and</td>
<td>imprecise and poorly reasoned</td>
<td>reasoned</td>
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<tr>
<td>Raises important questions</td>
<td>internalisation of basic concepts and</td>
<td>Superficial or mistaken</td>
<td>Basic terms and distinctions are regularly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognises important assumptions</td>
<td>principles.</td>
<td>comprehension of basic concepts and principles.</td>
<td>incorrectly used</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clarifies key concepts</td>
<td>Sometimes raises questions and</td>
<td>Does poorly in self-evaluation</td>
<td>Mistaken comprehension of basic concepts and</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identifies competing points of view</td>
<td>issues.</td>
<td>Superficially analyses questions and problems.</td>
<td>principles.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reasons from a clearly stated premise</td>
<td>Sometimes recognises key assumptions</td>
<td>Only partially clarifies concepts.</td>
<td>Does not raise questions and issues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shows sensitivity to important implications</td>
<td>Inconsistently uses language in</td>
<td>Rarely identifies competing points of view.</td>
<td>Does not recognise his/her assumptions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>and consequences</td>
<td>accordance with educated usage</td>
<td>Does not use language in keeping with</td>
<td>Does not clarify concepts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shows that basic concepts and</td>
<td>Sometimes identifies competing points of view.</td>
<td>educated usage</td>
<td>Does not use language in keeping with</td>
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<tr>
<td>principles are internalised</td>
<td>Demonstrates commitment to reason from</td>
<td>Confuses his/her point of view with the</td>
<td>educated usage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gives an in-depth analysis of questions and</td>
<td>clearly stated premises.</td>
<td>truth.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>problems</td>
<td>Sound reasoning and problem-solving within a</td>
<td>No understanding of a commitment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>field.</td>
<td>to reason from clearly stated premises.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Inconsistent reasoning and problem solving</td>
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<td>Poor reasoning and problem-solving</td>
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Acquisition of knowledge by memorising rather than comprehension.
ISF requires prospective students to prepare a Research Proposal.

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance about what the Institute for Sustainable Futures expects to see in a Research Proposal.

Aim for about 5 pages. You will need to work hard to be pithy and concise, at the same time as demonstrating excellence in your critical thinking and communication skills, consistent with entry level requirements for research higher degree students.

**Introduction and Significance (½ page)**
- State your research problem first. (i.e. not the general issue, but your piece of the pie)
- Make a case for the significance and importance of your intended research. Why does it matter? To whom? What use will it be?

**Background (1-2 pages)**
- Explain the background to the research problem through a review of relevant literature that demonstrates a sound knowledge of past and recent work in your domain of interest. Be sure to include peer-reviewed literature in your reading and analysis, as well as popular and/or industry material if that is relevant.
- Summarise and critique the main findings reported by others

**Proposed Research Questions and Contribution (½ -1 page)**
- Link your findings from the literature review with your own ideas. That is, specifically, what will you ask and answer? Are there any hypotheses to be tested?
- What are the expected outcomes? What do you see as your contribution to the topic under study? What use will it be? To whom? In what ways?

**Preliminary Research Design (1 page)**
- Theoretical Framework: What are your preliminary ideas about theoretical frameworks that might guide your study?
- Methodology: What methodology fits well with your question and your theoretical framework e.g., Do you plan to set up a mainly quantitative or qualitative study or something in between? Are you thinking of using case studies, surveys, models or some other method?
- Data: What type of data will help you answer the questions? Where and how will you collect the data?

**Budget (½ page)**
- Think through the costs of your study and specify how you plan to cover them. Distinguish between your project costs (e.g., travel, fieldwork, software, etc) and your personal costs for undertaking postgraduate study (living allowance, tuition fees, etc).

**References (½ -1 page)**
- List your readings