

Supervision of Research Students Policy

Section 1 - Background and Purpose

- (1) To ensure quality supervision of research postgraduates.
- (2) This Procedure explains what is required of supervisors of research candidates.
- (3) All higher degree by research candidates must have a principal supervisor and a co- supervisor.

Section 2 - Scope

- (4) Applies to:
 - a. All campuses
 - b. All staff who supervise postgraduate research students

Section 3 - Policy Statement

- (5) All candidates must have a principal supervisor who is a staff member and is on the Register of Supervisors, has the qualifications and experience that enables them to direct the work of the candidate and ensure the candidate meets all administrative and academic requirements. The principal supervisor will provide training in the planning and execution of research, be accessible in person to the candidate at mutually agreed times and should make contact on average once per fortnight and not less than once a month. The supervisors must ensure that the candidate is making satisfactory academic progress and where applicable suggest ways of addressing problems.
- (6) Candidates must also have a co-supervisor and may also have an external co- supervisor or associate supervisor who provides additional input and direction to the research. Co supervisors are members of staff of the University where external co- supervisors or associate supervisors are not members of staff of the University.
- (7) Candidates will have a Research Progress Panel as prescribed by the [Research Progress Panels Policy](#).
- (8) If a supervisor plans to take leave for more than 2 months for Masters candidates, or 3 months for doctoral candidates, during the period of candidature, arrangements for alternative supervision must be made.
- (9) Where interpersonal difficulties which prevent fruitful co-operation between candidate and supervisor occur the candidate should seek advice from the Graduate Research Coordinator or Head of School.

Section 4 - Procedure

Part A - Number of Supervisors

(10) All higher degree by research postgraduate candidates must have a principal supervisor and a co-supervisor and, where the Head of School or Graduate Research Coordinator deems appropriate, an Associate Supervisor or an External Co-supervisor.

(11) In addition candidates meet at regular intervals with a Research Progress Panel (RPP) consisting of their supervisors together with at least one other person, as described in the [Higher Degrees by Research Milestones, Reporting and Confirmation of Candidature Policy](#) and [Research Progress Panels Policy](#).

Part B - Qualification of Supervisors

(12) All supervisors shall hold at least a degree of Master or a degree considered by the Head of School to be the equivalent of at least a degree of Master; or have published work and research experience sufficient to qualify that supervisor to supervise candidates' research.

(13) Supervisors of doctoral degrees should normally hold a doctoral degree or hold at least a Masters degree with extensive research and academic experience.

Part C - Limits of Supervising

(14) A supervisor will not usually supervise more than eight full time equivalent candidates or a total of twelve individual candidates.

(15) In special cases, and taking account of the staff member's work load and responsibilities, the Dean of Graduate Studies may approve supervision of a higher number of equivalent students or candidates.

Part D - Research Progress Panels

(16) All higher degree by research students and their supervisors are supported by Research Progress Panels (RPP).

(17) The RPP Procedures provide processes for a student to discuss their supervision with their RPP in confidence and (with the agreement of the RPP chair) without a supervisor being present.

Part E - Register of Supervisors

(18) The Head of School's decision to approve someone as a supervisor may be guided by consideration of the person's curriculum vitae, research publications or other completed research (eg. creative work), research experience, experience of teaching research, evidence of familiarity with quality, ethics and safety issues and other contributions to research and research teaching communities (eg. RPP membership).

(19) Heads of Schools approve staff of La Trobe University, honorary associates, adjunct staff or staff of external organizations collaborating for research as supervisors, and forward their names (and relevant information) to the Graduate Research School for entry on the Supervisor Register. The Head of School will specify the level of supervision (doctorate, professional doctorate and/or masters) and role (principal supervisor, co-supervisor or associate supervisor) of the staff member or associate. (Note: the Supervision of Research Students Policy requires that a principal supervisor must be a staff member or an honorary or adjunct staff member specially contracted and paid for the purpose).

(20) No one may be assigned to supervise an HDR student who is not listed on the Supervisor Register.

Part F - Absent Supervisor

(21) If a supervisor plans to take leave from the University or collaborating organisation (for more than 2 months for masters candidates or 3 months for doctoral candidates) during the period of candidature, arrangements for alternative supervision must be made and notified to the Graduate Research School by the relevant Graduate Research Coordinator or Head of School.

Part G - Reporting Possible Problems with HDR Supervision

(22) Reporting possible problems with HDR supervision will involve one of the following processes:

- a. A written report by the higher degree by research candidate to the chair of his or her RPP, Graduate Research Co-ordinator, relevant Head of School, Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor Research (or Chair of the College Research Committee), regarding supervision considered by the candidate to be unsatisfactory.
- b. The candidate noting in the Progress Report or raising an issue in his or her RPP meeting regarding supervisory conditions considered by the Panel to be unsatisfactory.
- c. Examiners' reports suggesting that inadequacies in the quality of supervision may have been a contributory factor to problems with a dissertation.
- d. Independent assessment by the Graduate Research Coordinator, Head of School, and/or Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor Research indicating that supervision in regard to specific HDR candidates is unsatisfactory.
- e. Direct report by a supervisor to the Graduate Research Coordinator, Head of School and/or Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor Research, that influences outside of the supervisor's control are having a negative impact on the supervisor's ability to provide quality HDR supervision.

(23) In addition, when two or more students fail to complete their theses within twelve months of the elapsing of the maximum period of study for the degree, the Head of School may request an assessment of the supervisor's performance as in Part G below.

Part H - Actions Following Reports of Problems with HDR Supervision

(24) The relevant Head of School, RPP chair, or Graduate Research Coordinator will address any problems reported as described in Part F above with the supervisor and initiate further action if required. It may only be necessary to draw the problems to the supervisor's attention.

(25) However, the Head of School, RPP chair or Graduate Research Coordinator may determine that further action is necessary with respect to problems reported as described in Part F above. In such cases, the College Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor Research will convene a Supervision Assessment Committee (SAC).

(26) Following its investigation of reported problems with HDR supervision, the SAC may take the following actions:

- a. Dismiss a report of possible problems with supervision as being unfounded and initiate support processes for the complainant to resolve the problems that prompted the report in the first place.
- b. Conclude that the problems reported can be managed readily, and provide the supervisor with support aimed at improving his or her supervisory practices.
- c. Arrange for the supervisor to receive mentoring or training.
- d. Restrict the staff member's (or external supervisor's) supervision by suspension of all supervision for a period of time or other restrictions on supervision.
- e. Deregistration as describe in Part I below.

Part I - Deregistration of HDR Supervisors

(27) Where the SAC determines that the problems raised about supervision are significant, it may determine that the staff member (or external supervisor) should not supervise HDR students and that he or she should be deregistered.

Part J - Appeal Against SAC Action

(28) Where the supervisor disagrees with the determination of the SAC, the supervisor may appeal to the Board of Graduate Research.

Section 5 - Definitions

- a. For the purpose of this Policy and Procedure:
- b. Higher Degree by Research: Doctors of Philosophy (PhD), professional doctorates by research; and masters by research
- c. Supervisor: All research students, upon admission will have a principal supervisor and a co-supervisor appointed.
 - i. Principal supervisors are members of the academic staff of La Trobe University
 - ii. Co-supervisors are members of the academic staff of La Trobe University
 - iii. Associate Supervisors are not members of staff of the University but may be employed at another University or other institution (eg hospital, CSIRO)
 - iv. External Co-supervisors are not members of staff of the University but may be employed at another University or other institution (eg hospital, CSIRO)
- d. Supervision Assessment Committee: Committee to investigate problems raised about supervision of HDR candidates. Consists of the College Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor Research (or Chair of the College Research Committee), the relevant Head of School, and one registered HDR supervisor from the other College as nominated by the Chair of the Board of Graduate Research.
- e. Supervisor Register: a register maintained and approved by the Board of Graduate Research of people authorized to supervise HDR students enrolled at the University.

Section 6 - Stakeholders

Responsibility for implementation – Dean of Graduate Studies.

Responsibility for monitoring implementation and compliance – Board of Graduate Research.

Status and Details

Status	Historic
Effective Date	28th November 2016
Review Date	1st April 2017
Approval Authority	Academic Board
Approval Date	27th November 2016
Expiry Date	14th September 2017
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