# Graduate Research Supervision Policy

# Section 1 - Background and Purpose

(1) This Policy outlines the qualifications, responsibilities and requirements of graduate research supervisors, and define accountability for graduate research supervision at La Trobe University in order to ensure quality supervision of graduate research candidates.

# Section 2 - Scope

(2) Applies to:

    a. All supervisors of graduate research candidates
    b. All graduate research candidates
    c. All Heads of School or their delegate responsible for research training matters

# Section 3 - Policy Statement

(3) Graduate research supervision is an important activity that blends teaching and research expertise in equal measure. The work of graduate research supervisors is a combined pedagogical and research pursuit that is concerned with researcher development as well as with the production of research outputs. Graduate research and research training is an essential part of the research endeavour at La Trobe University. The provision of appropriate and high-quality supervision to graduate researchers is essential to this process.

(4) All candidates must have at least two supervisors, one of whom will be designated the Principal Supervisor. The Principal Supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the candidate meets all administrative and academic requirements of their course. All candidates must also have at least one co-supervisor, who may be an External co-supervisor.

(5) All graduate research supervisors must be registered on the Supervisor Register, before supervising candidates.

(6) Graduate research supervisors will have the qualifications and experience required, including discipline-specific knowledge, to direct the work of the graduate research candidate and to provide training in the planning and execution of research. Supervisors are required to ensure that students receive adequate and timely support throughout their candidature.

(7) The supervision of graduate researchers is complex, with many competing priorities and requirements. Each candidature presents unique circumstances, and represents the pinnacle of academic education and training. To provide high-quality supervision of graduate researchers requires ongoing training and development in the practice of supervision and research training, as well as active engagement with the research community of the relevant discipline.

(8) Supervisors and candidates will hold regular meetings to monitor and facilitate satisfactory academic progress as prescribed in the [Graduate Research Progress Policy](#). Supervisors must guide the candidate in making satisfactory academic progress and suggest ways of addressing problems.

(9) Heads of School are responsible for ensuring the continuity of supervision of candidates enrolled in their School, and for minimising disruption to candidate progress in the event of unplanned changes to supervisory arrangements.

(10) The responsibilities of graduate research candidates are outlined in the [Graduate Research Candidature Policy](#), the [Graduate Research Progress Policy](#), and the [Graduate Research Show Cause Procedure](#).

# Section 4 - Procedures

## Part A - Supervisor Roles

### All Supervisors

(11) All supervisors are responsible for ensuring that the candidate's research is conducted in accordance with the [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2018)](#), and the [Research Integrity Policy](#) and its related procedures.

(12) All supervisors will provide guidance and direction to the candidate and provide training in the planning and execution of research.

(13) All supervisors must guide the candidate in making satisfactory academic progress and suggest ways of addressing problems.

(14) Supervisors will be available to meet with the candidate at mutually agreed times and should be in contact on average once per fortnight.

(15) Supervisors are expected to encourage graduate research candidates to engage with professional development opportunities throughout their course of study, as appropriate. This includes workshops and seminars conducted by the Graduate Research School, industry engagement opportunities such as placements or internships, and intellectual climate activities such as reading groups and regular departmental seminars. This also includes guiding candidates in how and where to seek funding to undertake these activities.

(16) Supervisors must abide by the principles outlined in Schedule A: Expectations for Graduate Research Supervisors and Candidates.

(17) A La Trobe University professional employee or clinical appointee may only be a supervisor if they satisfy all the requirements of this policy, and with agreement from their primary employer.

### Principal Supervisor

(18) A Principal Supervisor must be a La Trobe University employee, or an honorary, adjunct, or emeritus appointment specially contracted for the purpose, either through an individual agreement or an agreement with an affiliated organisation.

(19) The Principal Supervisor is responsible for advising the candidate in the overall management of their candidature, and ensuring that the candidate meets all administrative and academic requirements of their course.

(20) The Principal Supervisor is the main administrative point of contact for the candidate's supervisory team.

(21) The Principal Supervisor is responsible for providing leadership of the supervisory team, and providing disciplinary

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context for the project, except where an External Primary Supervisor assumes this role.

## Co-supervisors

(22) Co-supervisors are members of staff of the University, including honorary, adjunct, or emeritus appointments, while External co-supervisors are not members of staff of the University.

## External Primary Supervisor

(23) Where the responsibility and leadership for a graduate research project lies primarily outside of La Trobe University, a non-La Trobe staff member may be designated External Primary Supervisor with approval from the Head of School and the Chair of the Board of Graduate Research, provided they meet the requirements of this policy.

(24) The External Primary Supervisor will be responsible for the majority of the supervisory workload.

(25) Candidates with an External Primary Supervisor are required to have a Principal Supervisor in accordance with the requirements above.

## Supervisor Eligibility

(26) The following table outlines eligibility requirements for different supervisor roles, subject to meeting the qualification requirements set out below:

| Appointment | Principal Supervisor | Co-supervisor | External Primary Supervisor |
|---|---|---|---|
| La Trobe academic employee | Yes | Yes | Not applicable |
| La Trobe honorary, adjunct, or emeritus appointee | Yes, only if specially contracted for the purpose | Yes | Not applicable |
| La Trobe professional employee or clinical appointee | Yes, only with agreement from primary employer | Yes, only with agreement from primary employer | Not applicable |
| Non-La Trobe staff | No | Yes (External co-supervisor) | Yes, where responsibility and leadership for a graduate research project lies primarily outside of La Trobe |

# Part B - Qualifications of Supervisors

(27) All supervisors should normally hold a doctoral degree, or have extensive research and academic experience which is at least equivalent to that required for a doctoral degree and sufficient to qualify that supervisor to supervise candidates' research. This will be assessed by the Chair of the Board of Graduate Research following an application to register a supervisor who does not hold a doctoral degree.

(28) All supervisors must be research active in disciplines or fields relevant to the research being undertaken by candidates to be supervised. This includes maintaining knowledge of contemporary developments in their field or discipline through continuing scholarship, research, or advances in practice.

(29) To be appointed a Principal Supervisor normally requires the supervisor to have co-supervised one or more graduate research candidates to successful completion of a higher degree by research.

(30) Honorary, adjunct, and emeritus appointees may be appointed as supervisors, and non-La Trobe staff may be appointed as External co-supervisors, of graduate researchers where agreed by the Head of School. In accordance with the [Honorary, Adjunct and Clinical Staff Appointments and Visiting and Affiliated Staff Policy and Procedure](#), this is

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dependent on the appointee's demonstration of their expertise, experience, qualifications and proficiency to provide a supervisory role.

(31) La Trobe clinical appointees and professional staff may only act as supervisors for graduate researchers where they meet the requirements above and where agreed between the University and their primary employer. Such agreement must be subject to considerations of workload, relevant qualifications, expertise and experience to provide a supervisory role.

(32) Graduate research candidates are not eligible to supervise another candidate at La Trobe University. In exceptional circumstances, Master's degree candidates may be supervised by La Trobe University staff who are doctoral candidates if the staff member also has extensive research and academic experience sufficient to qualify them to supervise the candidates' research as described above, and where the supervisor's area of research is sufficiently different to that of the candidate so as not to result in potential conflicts of interest.

# Part C - Supervisor Register

(33) The Supervisor Register records the details of all graduate research supervisors at La Trobe University. Only people listed on the Supervisor Register may be assigned to supervise a graduate research candidate.

(34) Heads of School will nominate any prospective supervisors to be registered. The Head of School or Director of Graduate Research will specify the level of supervision (doctorate and/or Master's) and role (Principal Supervisor, co-supervisor or External co-supervisor) of the nominee, and will provide clear justification of the nominee's relevant experience, as described above, where they do not hold a doctoral degree or meet other specified qualification requirements.

(35) Supervisors are required to have read and understood induction resources provided by the Graduate Research School, outlining their responsibilities, as part of registration on the Supervisor Register.

(36) The Chair of the Board of Graduate Research is responsible for approval of applications to be listed on the Supervisor Register.

(37) The Head of School's decision to nominate someone as a supervisor must be guided by consideration of the person's research activity, including knowledge of contemporary developments in the discipline, curriculum vitae, research publications or other completed research (e.g. creative work), research experience, experience of research training, evidence of familiarity with research quality, ethics and safety issues and other contributions to research and research training communities.

# Part D - Limits of Supervising

(38) A supervisor will not usually supervise more than eight full time equivalent candidates or a total of twelve individual candidates at once. Heads of School are responsible for determining the appropriate number of candidates for individual supervisors, taking into account work load, experience, and capacity to provide adequate supervision.

(39) The Chair of the Board of Graduate Research may determine alternative supervision limits on a case-by-case basis taking account of the staff member's work load, experience, and responsibilities.

# Part E - Supervisor Development and Training

(40) Supervisors must be familiar with their own and the University's responsibilities under the Higher Education Standards (Threshold Standards) 2015 and the National Code 2018.

(41) Formal induction resources and orientation workshops for supervisors will be provided by the Graduate Research School. These will address the expectations of supervisors under the Higher Education Standards (Threshold

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Standards) 2015 regarding research knowledge and skills (section 3.2.3) and the development of appropriate research environments (section 4.2.2). School-based inductions for new supervisors will be conducted by the relevant Director of Graduate Research.

(42) The Graduate Research School will also administer an annual program of development and training opportunities for supervisors that satisfies the requirements of the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2018) (section 3.1).

(43) It is an expectation of the University that supervisors will pursue development and training opportunities relating to the supervision of graduate researchers as part of their ongoing professional development, integrated with the University's broader performance development framework.

# Part F - Appointment of Supervisory Teams

(44) All graduate research candidates must have a Principal Supervisor and at least one co-supervisor appointed prior to enrolment. No person will be allowed to commence research candidature without appropriate supervisory arrangements in place.

(45) The Head of School is required to approve the appointment of supervisors in their School to graduate research candidates, and must take into consideration whether the supervisors have experience of graduate research supervision, experience in the fields of research appropriate for the candidate's planned work, and their current research activity in those fields, as well as their availability to provide supervision. Supervisors must inform the Head of School of any potential conflicts of interest which may arise in supervising a particular candidate.

(46) Where members of the supervisory team are from different Schools, the Head of School in which the candidate is enrolled (that of their Principal Supervisor) is responsible for consulting with the other relevant Heads of School in relation to workload and other considerations when appointing the supervisory team.

(47) Where an individual on a fixed term or research-contingent contract is appointed as supervisor for a graduate research candidate, the Head of School must confirm that the candidate's overall supervisory team can provide continuity of supervision in the event that the La Trobe University appointment of one or more of their supervisors ceases during their candidature.

(48) Supervisory workload may be distributed in any proportion between the Principal Supervisor and co-supervisors as deemed appropriate by their Heads of School.

(49) Graduate research candidates may apply to vary their supervisory arrangements at any time, with the endorsement of their current supervisors and Head of School or Director of Graduate Research.

# Part G - Continuity of Supervision

(50) Where a supervisor takes leave during the period of candidature, they should work proactively with the candidate and School to ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place to provide continuity of supervision, such as temporarily reallocating supervisory workload between the candidate's other supervisors taking into account their availability during the period of leave.

(51) In the event that a candidate's supervisor is no longer able to provide supervision in accordance with this Policy or takes leave for a period of two months or more, including for participation in an outside studies program, the Head of School is responsible for ensuring alternative supervisory arrangements are made in consultation with the graduate researcher. Any resulting gaps in supervision must be no more than 10 working days. This may include interim arrangements while an acceptable, permanent arrangement is sought, such as the appointment of an acting supervisor, the appointment of additional supervisors, or reallocating supervisory workload between the candidate's

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other supervisors.

(52) The Head of School or Director of Graduate Research will notify the Graduate Research School with at least four weeks' notice of any anticipated changes to a candidate's supervisory arrangements and outline what alternative arrangements will be made, including whether any gap in supervision will occur.

## Part H - Resolving Supervisory Problems

Due to the unique nature of graduate research and research training, it is not unusual for difficulties to occur in the course of a graduate research candidature, whether through problems with communication or the misalignment of expectations between parties involved.

(53) Where difficulties occur that impede the fruitful co-operation between a candidate and a supervisor or within a supervisory team, all parties should seek advice to resolve these issues as soon as possible. Parties may seek advice and consultation to resolve concerns in regards to supervision from the Graduate Research Coordinator, Director of Graduate Research, or the Chair of the candidate's Progress Committee. Advice can also be sought at any time from the Graduate Research School.

(54) Candidates, supervisors, or other members of staff can formally report concerns relating to graduate research supervision to the relevant Head of School or Pro Vice-Chancellor (Graduate and Global Research). In the event of such a report being received, the Head of School or Pro Vice-Chancellor (Graduate and Global Research) will notify each other within five working days. In the first instance, the Head of School or Pro Vice-Chancellor (Graduate and Global Research) may attempt to resolve concerns relating to graduate research supervision through consultation with the parties involved.

(55) If allegations of misconduct or serious misconduct are made, these will be dealt with according to the processes described in the [La Trobe University Collective Agreement](#).

(56) In addition to the steps outlined above, graduate research candidates may also lodge a formal complaint at any time according to the Student Complaints Management Policy.

(57) Following the receipt of a formal report by any party, the Head of School and Pro Vice-Chancellor (Graduate and Global Research) may determine that further action is necessary. In such cases, the Head of School or Pro Vice-Chancellor (Graduate and Global Research) will ask the College Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor, Research to convene a Supervision Assessment Committee (SAC) to further explore issues associated with the supervision.

(58) Where the Head of School or Pro Vice-Chancellor (Graduate and Global Research) determines that further action is required as described above, or a registered supervisor is found to have engaged in a serious breach of University Policy or Codes of Conduct, a SAC will be convened within 10 working days.

(59) A SAC consists of:

a. the College Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research) (or Chair of the College Research Committee), who will chair the SAC;
b. the relevant Head of School; and
c. a member of the Board of Graduate Research who is independent from the area of the individual being investigated, as nominated by the Chair of the Board of Graduate Research.

(60) Where a SAC invites candidates to provide information regarding a particular issue, candidates may have a support person in attendance, such as a Graduate Research Student Advocate from the La Trobe University Student Union.

(61) Following its investigation of reported problems with graduate research supervision, the SAC may recommend to

the Board of Graduate Research, through the Chair, that the following actions be taken:

a. no further action is required.
b. the problems reported can be managed readily, and the supervisor be provided with support aimed at improving their supervisory practices.
c. impose restrictions or additional requirements on the supervisor. For example, by restricting the total number of candidates allowed to be supervised, or prohibiting new candidates being allocated for a period of time.
d. require that alternative supervisory arrangements for the candidate involved be implemented by the School.
e. the supervisor involved be removed from the Supervisor Register.
f. refer the matter to Human Resources for further review in accordance with the [Code of Conduct](#) and relevant policies.

(62) Upon receiving the SAC's recommendation, the Chair of the Board of Graduate Research will make a final determination about actions to be taken, and will notify the members of the SAC, the supervisor involved, and the relevant Head of School of the determination within five working days.

(63) Supervisors may appeal a determination in writing to the Board of Graduate Research within 10 working days of being notified of the determination. In the case of deregistration, the supervisor may appeal in writing to the Chair of the Research and Graduate Studies Committee under the same conditions. Supervisors not satisfied with the outcome of any appeal may seek a review from the University Ombudsman.

(64) Where a SAC is convened which results in action being taken as described above, the Head of School will liaise with the affected graduate research candidates to provide support and ensure that any impact on academic progress is minimised and alternative supervisory arrangements are made where required.

# Section 5 - Definitions

(65) Nil.

# Section 6 - Stakeholders

Responsibility for implementation – Pro Vice-Chancellor (Graduate and Global Research).

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

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## Status and Details

| | |
|---|---|
| **Status** | Current |
| **Effective Date** | 15th September 2017 |
| **Review Date** | 15th September 2020 |
| **Approval Authority** | Policy Advisor |
| **Approval Date** | 15th September 2017 |
| **Expiry Date** | Not Applicable |
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