

Graduate Research Supervision Policy

Section 1 - Key Information

Policy Type and Approval Body	Academic - Academic Board
Accountable Executive - Policy	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Graduate and Global Research)
Responsible Manager - Policy	Senior Manager, Graduate and Global Research
Review Date	26 August 2027

Section 2 - Purpose

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

Section 3 - Scope

(2) Applies to:

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

Section 4 - Key Decisions

Key Decisions	Role
Nomination of supervisors to be registered	Dean School Director of Graduate Research (SDGR)
Approves the registration or deregistration of supervisors on the supervisor register	Chair, BGR
Determines alternative supervision limits on a case-by-case basis	Chair, BGR
Appointment of supervisory teams in their School	Dean SDGR
Responsibility for ensuring continuity of graduate research supervision within their School	Dean
Determines the outcome based on the recommendation from a Supervision Assessment Committee	Chair, BGR

Section 5 - 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 concerned with researcher development and research output production. Graduate research and research training are 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 their course's administrative and academic requirements. 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 graduate research candidate's work and provide training in the planning and execution of research. Supervisors are required to ensure that students receive adequate and timely support and feedback 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, supervisors require ongoing training and development in the practice of supervision and research training, and active engagement with the research community of the relevant discipline.

(8) All graduate research candidates, and their supervisors, must be aware of their responsibilities as outlined in the [Research - Higher Degree Student Misconduct Procedure](#), to ensure research is conducted in accordance with the [Australian Code for Responsible Conduct of Research \(2018\)](#) and the [Research Integrity Policy](#) and its related procedures. Supervisors will ensure that candidates receive appropriate guidance and training in research integrity.

(9) 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, including giving timely feedback.

(10) Deans 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.

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

Section 6 - Procedures

Part A - Supervisor Roles

All Supervisors

(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 upon times and should be in contact on average once per fortnight.

(15) Supervisors are expected to encourage all 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, intellectual climate activities such as reading groups and regular departmental seminars and guiding candidates on how and where to seek funding to undertake these activities.

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

Principal Supervisor

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

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

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

(20) The Principal Supervisor is responsible for providing the supervisory team's leadership and providing disciplinary context for the project, except where an External Primary Supervisor (defined below) assumes this role.

Co-supervisors

(21) Co-supervisors are members of staff of the University, including adjunct or emeritus appointments. External co-supervisors are not staff members of the University and may include academic staff at other universities, traditional knowledge from First Nations People, employees from industry partners, and representatives of other private sectors, public sector, non-government or community organisations.

External Primary Supervisor

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

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

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

Supervisor Eligibility

(25) The following table outlines eligibility requirements for different supervisor roles, subject to meeting the qualification requirements set out below, along with considerations of expertise and experience to provide a supervisory role:

Appointment	Principal Supervisor	Co-supervisor	External Primary Supervisor
La Trobe academic staff member	Yes	Yes	Not applicable

Appointment	Principal Supervisor	Co-supervisor	External Primary Supervisor
La Trobe adjunct, emeritus or joint PhD partner institute appointee	Yes, only if specially contracted for the purpose	Yes (External co-supervisor if appointee of a joint PhD partner institute)	Not applicable
La Trobe professional staff member or clinical appointee	Yes, only with agreement from the primary employer	Yes, only with agreement from the 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

(26) Individuals registering as supervisors who work for a government, business, non-governmental organisation or community organisation, and are not employed by a higher education provider or an organisation that is an affiliate, controlled entity or subsidiary of a higher education provider, including Medical Research Institutes, will be classified as research end-users.

Part B - Qualifications of Supervisors

(27) All supervisors should normally hold a doctoral degree, or have extensive research academic experience, or be the custodians of Traditional Knowledge, 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 or be the custodians of Traditional Knowledge and cultural practices relevant to candidates' research. This includes maintaining and making original contributions to the knowledge of contemporary developments in their field or discipline through continuing scholarship, research, advances in practice, or ongoing cultural practice.

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

(30) 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

(31) 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.

(32) Deans of School will nominate any prospective supervisors to be registered. The Dean or Director of Graduate Research will specify the level of supervision (doctorate and/or Masters by research) and roles (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.

(33) The Dean decision to nominate someone as a supervisor must be guided by consideration of the person's

research activity or ongoing cultural practice, including knowledge of contemporary developments in the discipline, curriculum vitae, research publications or other completed research (e.g. creative work), research experience, Traditional knowledge, other relevant expertise or experience, the experience of research training, evidence of familiarity with research quality, ethics and safety issues and other contributions to research and research training communities.

(34) 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.

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

(36) The Chair of the Board of Graduate Research may remove supervisors from the Supervisor Register if they are no longer actively engaged in graduate research supervision at La Trobe, if they are no longer actively engaged in research, as the outcome of a Supervision Assessment Committee or because of an academic or general misconduct finding.

Part D - Limits of Supervising

(37) A supervisor will not usually supervise more than eight full-time equivalent candidates or a total of twelve individual candidates at once. Deans of School are responsible for determining the appropriate number of candidates for individual supervisors, considering the workload, experience, and capacity to provide adequate supervision.

(38) 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

(39) All supervisors must be familiar with their own and the University's responsibilities under the [Higher Education Standards Framework \(Threshold Standards\) 2021](#) and the [National Code 2018](#).

(40) The Graduate Research School will provide formal induction resources and orientation workshops for supervisors. These will address the expectations of supervisors under the [Higher Education Standards Framework \(Threshold Standards\) 2021](#) regarding research knowledge and skills (section 3.2.3) and the development of appropriate research environments (section 4.2.2). The relevant Director of Graduate Research will conduct School-based inductions for new supervisors.

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

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

Part F - Appointment of Supervisory Teams

(43) 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.

(44) The Dean 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, Traditional Knowledge or other expertise relating to the candidate's research, and their current research activity or ongoing cultural practice in those fields, as well as their availability to provide supervision.

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

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

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

(48) Graduate research candidates may apply to vary their supervisory arrangements at any time, with the endorsement of their supervisors and Dean or Director of Graduate Research. The principal supervisor may endorse on behalf of the supervisory team and is responsible for consulting with other team members where appropriate. Where a new principal supervisor is being appointed, they are to endorse the change on behalf of the supervisory team. Approval for change must not be reasonably withheld.

Part G - Conflict of Interest

(49) Supervisors and candidates must be guided by the University's [Conflict of Interest Policy](#) and must inform the Dean of any potential conflicts of interest which may arise in supervising a particular candidate. Supervisors must always act with integrity and be guided by the University's [Conflict of Interest Policy](#) to ensure that their actions do not raise concerns about the institution's management practice, which could undermine community trust in research.

(50) A person must not be appointed nor remain a supervisor (Principal, External Primary, or Co-supervisor) of a candidate if that appointment or its continuation could be reasonably expected to give rise to a conflict of interest that could affect the progress or standing of the candidate.

(51) A supervisor must not be in a close personal, intimate or romantic relationship with any of their candidates. Where such a relationship develops during candidature, the supervisor must declare a conflict of interest, and another supervisor must be appointed immediately.

Part H - Continuity of Supervision

(52) 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.

(53) If 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 Dean 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 ten working days. This may include interim arrangements while an acceptable, permanent arrangement is sought, such as an acting supervisor's appointment, additional supervisors' appointment, or reallocating supervisory workload between the candidate's other supervisors.

(54) The Dean or Director of Graduate Research will notify the Graduate Research School with at least four weeks' notice of any changes to a candidate's supervisory arrangements, what alternative arrangements will be made,

and whether any gap in supervision will occur.

Part I - Resolving Supervisory Problems

(55) 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.

(56) 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.

(57) Parties may seek advice and help to resolve supervision concerns from the relevant Graduate Research Coordinator, Director of Graduate Research, or the candidate's Progress Committee Chair. Any party may arrange independent mediation if required or seek advice at any time from the Graduate Research School.

(58) Candidates, supervisors, or other staff members can formally report concerns relating to graduate research supervision to the relevant Dean or the Chair of the Board of Graduate Research. In such a report is received, the Dean or the Chair of the Board of Graduate Research will notify each other within five working days. In the first instance, the Dean or the Chair of the Board of Graduate Research may attempt to resolve concerns relating to graduate research supervision through consultation with the parties involved.

(59) 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](#).

(60) If allegations of misconduct or serious misconduct are made against a La Trobe University staff member, these will be dealt with according to the processes described in the [La Trobe University Enterprise Agreement 2023](#).

(61) Following the receipt of a formal report by any party, the Dean and the Chair of the Board of Graduate Research may determine that further action is necessary. In such cases, the Dean or the Chair of the Board of Graduate Research will ask the Associate Dean, Research & Industry Engagement to convene a Supervision Assessment Committee (SAC) to investigate the supervision issues.

(62) A SAC will also be convened if a registered supervisor has engaged in a serious breach of University Policy or [Code of Conduct](#).

(63) The SAC will be convened within ten working days of the Associate Dean, Research & Industry Engagement being invited and will consist of:

- a. the Associate Dean, Research & Industry Engagement of the relevant School who will chair the SAC;
- b. the relevant Dean; 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.

(64) The supervisor may have a support person who may not be a legal practitioner or person with a law degree and may not normally speak during the meeting unless the supervisor/candidate is registered for disability support. A support person may take notes of the meeting.

(65) Where a SAC invites candidates to provide information regarding a particular issue, candidates may have in attendance a support person, such as a Graduate Research Student Advocate from [Student Advocacy](#).

(66) 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 should be provided with support aimed at improving their supervisory practices.
- c. impose restrictions or additional requirements on the supervisor. For example, restricting the total number of candidates allowed to be supervised, or prohibiting new candidates from being allocated for a period of time.
- d. require that an alternative supervisory arrangement 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.

(67) 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 Dean of the determination within five working days.

(68) Supervisors may appeal a determination in writing to the Board of Graduate Research within ten 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.

(69) Where a SAC is convened, which results in action being taken as described above, the Dean 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 7 - Definitions

(70) Nil.

Section 8 - Authority and Associated Information

(71) This Policy is made under the [La Trobe University Act 2009](#).

Status and Details

Status	Current
Effective Date	10th June 2021
Review Date	26th August 2027
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