

Graduate Research Supervision Policy

Section 1 - Key Information

Policy Type and Approval Body	Academic – Academic Board
Accountable Executive - Policy	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research)
Responsible Manager - Policy	Senior Manager, Graduate Research
Review Date	29 April 2028

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 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	Deans of School (or nominee)
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	Deans of School (or nominee)
Responsibility for ensuring continuity of graduate research supervision within their School	Deans of School (or nominee)
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 candidates 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](#). Candidates should keep a record of supervision meetings, noting any agreed actions arising. Supervisors must guide the candidate in making satisfactory academic progress and suggest ways of addressing problems, including giving timely feedback.

(10) Deans of School (or nominee) 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' rights and responsibilities are further outlined in the [Student Charter](#), the [Student Behaviours Policy](#), the [Graduate Research - Schedule A: Expectations for Graduate Research Supervisors and Candidates](#), the [Graduate Research Candidature Policy](#), the [Graduate Research Progress Policy](#), the [Graduate Research Show Cause Procedure](#), and the [Graduate Research Examinations Policy](#), and its associated procedures.

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) All supervisors must undertake a La Trobe induction to supervision prior to their registration.
- (15) Supervisors will be available to meet with the candidate at mutually agreed upon times and should be in contact on average once per fortnight.
- (16) 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.
- (17) Supervisors and candidates must abide by the principles outlined in [Graduate Research – Schedule A: Expectations for Graduate Research Supervisors and Candidates](#).

Principal Supervisor

- (18) A principal supervisor must be a La Trobe University employee, a joint degree 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.
- (19) 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. The principal supervisor is expected to continue to provide administrative support if a candidate is on a leave of absence, or if their candidature is lapsed or their status is under examination.
- (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 the supervisory team's leadership and providing disciplinary context for the project.

Co-Supervisors

- (22) Co-supervisors are members of staff of the University, a joint degree partner institute employee, or an adjunct or emeritus appointment.
- (23) Co-supervisors are responsible for supporting the supervision of the candidate with relevant research expertise.

External Co-Supervisors

- (24) Where additional knowledge or expertise for a graduate research project lies outside of La Trobe University, a non-La Trobe staff member who has a background in research may be designated an external co-supervisor. External co-supervisors may include staff at other universities including academic staff, professional employees or clinical employees of another university or research institution.
- (25) External co-supervisors are responsible for supporting the supervision of the candidate with relevant research expertise.

(26) External co-supervisors are not normally remunerated. Their involvement in contributing to research at La Trobe University is seen as part of their own professional or community outreach with the University in research. They are encouraged to maximise their involvement in La Trobe's research community as part of their professional or community relationship with the University.

Industry or Community Co-Supervisor

(27) Where additional knowledge or expertise for a graduate research project lies outside of La Trobe University, a non-La Trobe staff member who does not have a background in research may be designated industry or community co-supervisor for the duration of the project only with approval from the Dean (or nominee) and the Chair of the Board of Graduate Research.

(28) The industry or community co-supervisor is responsible for providing insight and guidance into industry, creative or cultural practices as appropriate to the project and may include custodians of Traditional Knowledge from First Nations People, employees from industry partners, and representatives of other private sectors, public sector, non-government or community organisations.

(29) Candidates with an industry or community co-supervisor are required to have a principal and co-supervisor (or external co-supervisor) in accordance with the requirements above.

(30) Industry or community co-supervisors are not normally remunerated. Their involvement in contributing to research at La Trobe University is seen as part of their own professional or community outreach with the University in research. They are encouraged to maximise their involvement in La Trobe's research community as part of their professional or community relationship with the University.

Supervisor Eligibility

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

Appointment	Principal Supervisor	Co-Supervisor	External Co-Supervisor	Industry or Community Co-Supervisor
La Trobe academic staff member	Yes	Yes	Not applicable	Not applicable
Joint degree partner institute appointee	Yes	Yes	Not applicable	Not applicable
La Trobe adjunct or emeritus	Yes, only if specially contracted for the purpose	Yes	Not applicable	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	Not applicable
Non-La Trobe staff (may include La Trobe consultants, agency and other types of staff (CONAGOTHS), industry and community members including Traditional Knowledge holders).	No	No	Yes, where additional expertise for a graduate research project lies outside of La Trobe	Yes, where additional expertise for a graduate research project lies outside of La Trobe

(32) 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

(33) All supervisors (other than industry or community co-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.

(34) All supervisors (other than industry or community co-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.

(35) Industry or community co-supervisors should normally have relevant and specialist expertise that they can bring to support the candidate and their project, which may include industry experience, Traditional Knowledge, ethical conduct, and/or practicing cultural safety.

(36) 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 at the same course AQF level. For example, to become a principal supervisor for a doctoral candidate, the supervisor should have co-supervised at least one doctoral candidate to completion.

(37) Graduate research candidates are not normally eligible to supervise another candidate at La Trobe University.

Part C - Supervisor Register

(38) 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.

(39) Deans of School (or nominee) will endorse any prospective supervisors to be registered. The Dean or Director of Graduate Research will specify the level of supervision (doctorate and/or Master's by research) and roles (principal supervisor, co-supervisor, external or co-supervisor or industry or community 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.

(40) The Dean's (or nominee's) decision to endorse someone as a supervisor must be guided by consideration of the person's research activity, industry experience, 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, industry 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.

(41) 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.

(42) The Chair of the Board of Graduate Research is responsible for the approval of applications to be listed on the Supervisor Register and applications to revise the type, or level, of supervision of registered supervisors.

(43) The Chair of the Board of Graduate Research may also remove, suspend to new supervision, or revise the level of supervision of supervisors from the Supervisor Register where there are academic grounds to do so. This could include if they are no longer actively engaged in graduate research supervision at La Trobe, if they are no longer actively

engaged in research, if they have not undertaken a supervisor induction or development program, as the outcome of a Supervision Assessment Committee, or because of an academic or general misconduct finding or any other aspect that may impact a candidate's progress and wellbeing.

(44) The Graduate Research School will conduct an annual review the supervisor register to ensure supervisors meet the requirements for registration.

(45) The outcome of the review will be that supervisors are either considered to be active or inactive. Inactive supervisors (other than industry and community co-supervisors) will need to provide evidence of research engagement and participation in research training development programs before they can take on new graduate research candidates.

(46) Industry and community co-supervisors who are registered for the co-supervision of a specific candidate will be made inactive when they are no longer supervising an active candidate.

(47) Supervisors who have been removed from the Supervisor Register may apply to be re-registered provided they meet the conditions for registration.

(48) Supervisors may appeal a determination to deregister, to have their status changed to inactive, or revise their level of supervision in writing to the Board of Graduate Research within ten business days of being notified of the determination.

Part D - Limits of Supervising

(49) 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 (or their nominees) are responsible for determining the appropriate number of candidates for individual supervisors, considering the workload, experience, and capacity to provide adequate supervision.

(50) 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

(51) 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](#).

(52) 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.

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

(54) 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

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

(56) The Dean or Director of Graduate Research 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.

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

(58) Where an individual on a fixed-term or research-contingent contract is appointed as supervisor for a graduate research candidate, the Dean (or nominee) 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.

(59) Supervisory workload may be distributed in any proportion as normally guided by [Graduate Research - Schedule A: Expectations for Graduate Research Supervisors and Candidates](#) between the supervisors as deemed appropriate by their Dean (or nominee).

(60) 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.

(61) Where a new principal supervisor is being appointed from a different school approval must be obtained from the relevant Dean (or nominee) in both the original and new school.

Part G - Conflict of Interest

(62) Supervisors and candidates must be guided by the University's [Conflict of Interest Policy](#) and must inform the Dean (or nominee) 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.

(63) A person must not be appointed nor remain a supervisor (principal supervisor, co-supervisor, external co-supervisor, or industry or community 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.

(64) 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.

(65) A supervisor must not normally be in a close personal, intimate or romantic relationship with another member of a candidate's supervisory team or progress committee chair. Where such a relationship develops during candidature,

the supervisor must declare a conflict of interest, after which the Chair, BGR will take appropriate steps to ensure that appropriate supervisory arrangements are in place for the candidate. The normal expectation is that supervisors who have a close personal relationship will not engage in the supervision of the same candidate.

Part H - Continuity of Supervision

(66) 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.

(67) 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 (or nominee) 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 (10) business 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.

(68) The Dean (or nominee) 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

(69) Due to the unique nature of graduate research and research training, circumstances may at times arise in the course of a graduate research candidature, which may include difficulties with communication or the misalignment of expectations between parties involved.

(70) Where difficulties arise 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.

(71) 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 seek advice at any time from the Graduate Research School, or may arrange independent mediation if required.

(72) Candidates, supervisors, or other staff members can formally report concerns relating to graduate research supervision to the relevant Dean (or nominee) or the Chair of the Board of Graduate Research. In such a report is received, the Dean (or nominee) or the Chair of the Board of Graduate Research will notify each other within five (5) business days. In the first instance, the Dean (or nominee) 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.

(73) 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](#).

(74) 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](#).

(75) Upon receipt of a formal report by any party, the Dean (or nominee) and the Chair of the Board of Graduate Research will determine the need for any interim measures to protect the safety and wellbeing of all parties, and where relevant, protect the integrity of any investigation. Such interim measures may include a temporary change in supervision or alternative study locations. All parties will normally be advised of any interim measures that have, or will be, put in place by the Dean (or nominee) and the Chair of the Board of Graduate Research.

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

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

(78) The SAC will be convened within ten (10) business 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 (or nominee); 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.

(79) A member of the staff of the Graduate Research School will act as secretary to the SAC.

(80) Where applicable, the SAC process, the need for confidentiality, the protection from victimisation and the responsibility to respond in a timely manner will be explained to all parties who lodge a formal complaint against a supervisor. They will be advised that in order to assist with a resolution the relevant details of the formal complaint will be provided to the supervisor to ensure that there is natural justice.

(81) The chair of the SAC will write to the supervisor informing them that issues have been raised regarding their supervisory practice and that a SAC has been convened to investigate the matter. The Chair can inform the supervisor of the general nature of the complaint, taking into consideration both procedural fairness and the wellbeing of all parties concerned. The chair will invite the supervisor to attend a meeting of the SAC.

(82) The supervisor may have a support person in attendance 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.

(83) Where a SAC invites candidates to provide information regarding a particular issue, candidates may have a support person in attendance who may not be a legal practitioner or person with a law degree, such as a Student Advocate.

(84) 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, or changing their registered level of supervision.
- 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 People & Culture for further review in accordance with the [Code of Conduct](#) and relevant policies.

(85) 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 (5) business days.

(86) Supervisors may appeal a determination in writing to the Board of Graduate Research within ten (10) business 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.

(87) Students are also eligible to lodge a complaint with the [National Student Ombudsman](#). For further information on complaints considered by the [National Student Ombudsman](#), go to [Making a complaint | National Student Ombudsman \(NSO\)](#).

(88) Where a SAC is convened, which results in action being taken as described above, the Dean (or nominee) 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

(89) For the purposes of this Policy and Procedure:

- a. CONAGOTH: University term for “Consultants; Agents and Other” types of staff.

Section 8 - Authority and Associated Information

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

Status and Details

Status	Current
Effective Date	29th April 2025
Review Date	29th April 2028
Approval Authority	Academic Board
Approval Date	29th April 2025
Expiry Date	Not Applicable
Responsible Manager - Policy	Rebecca Lubansky Senior Manager, Graduate Research +61 3 9479 1460
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