HIGHER DEGREE RESEARCH SUPERVISION GUIDELINES

Policy Hierarchy link	Higher Degree Research Supervision Policy		
Responsible Officer	Dean of Graduate Research		
Contact Officer	Manager, Graduate Research School		
Superseded Documents	None		
File Number	2010/04966		
Associated Documents	Conditions for the Award of Degrees Admission APR Code of Conduct Research Code of Conduct Conflict of Interest Intellectual Property Policy		
Version	**Authorised by**	**Approval Date**	**Effective Date**
1.0	Authorised by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)	9 August 2010	9 August 2010

1. Introduction and Scope

The purpose of these guidelines is to outline good practices that can assist and support the highest quality Higher Degree Research (HDR) candidate experience and outcomes. This encompasses proposed supervisory models in the context of timely progression through the degree and good practice supervision.

These guidelines are for supervisors and candidates.

2. Definitions

Applicant. A person applying for admission to a postgraduate research degree.

Higher Degree Research (HDR) candidate. A person enrolled in a postgraduate research degree.

Supervisor. Any academic staff member in a supervisory role with HDR candidates including co-supervisors, joint supervisors and staff on supervisory panels.

Candidate. An enrolled HDR student

Candidature. The total period of active student enrolment in a degree from first enrolment to completion of the degree. Candidature is suspended during periods of approved leave.

3. Candidature Management

HDR candidates at UNSW are allocated a maximum period for completion of 4 years for a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and 2 years for a Masters by Research (MRes) or Master of Philosophy (MPhil). UNSW supervisors support candidates in producing a body of original research appropriate to the degree in which they are enrolled.

Progression of candidates in a research degree and their timely completion is dependent on a range of practices including:

- good recruitment and admission practices,
- setting up mutually agreed plans for communication and a project framework in the initial stages of candidature,
- milestone setting and progress review appropriate to the stage of the candidature, and
- appropriate support during thesis preparation and submission.

3.1 Recruitment and admission practices

Robust and consistent recruitment and admission practices allow identification of applicants with the highest potential for timely completion of research degrees.

It is important to provide:

- timely, knowledgeable and engaged responses to preliminary enquiries to facilitate recruitment of the highest quality candidates, and
- thorough, informed and responsible consideration of an applicant's suitability as a potential HDR candidate, in conjunction with ensuring the applicants' research interests are relevant to the expertise available at UNSW.

3.1.1 Recruitment

Recruitment of the best research candidates often results from considerable communication between researchers and applicants. Staff members wishing to act as HDR supervisors can raise their profile by ensuring that their web presence clearly outlines the research areas with potential for HDR candidature and is up to date.

Good practice selection requires considered assessment of:

- the ability to complete the proposed research successfully and on time, based on the applicant's qualifications and experience,
- candidate–supervisor compatibility based on the proposed research, work styles, personalities and other relevant factors, and
- availability of space, resources and infrastructure to support the candidature.

Aspiring applicants should conduct their own due diligence and discuss their needs and requirements including determining the resources and infrastructure available for their proposed research with potential supervisors prior to applying for candidature.

A face-to-face meeting should be a part of the assessment process. Where this is not possible, supervisors should personally contact each applicant and interview them by telephone to assess their potential and whether there is an appropriate match in research interests.

3.1.2 Admission

UNSW Admission Policy and the Conditions for Award of research degrees outline the minimum requirements for entry into HDR programs.

If research experience and potential are not clear, supervisors can recommend admission to a MRes or MPhil degree rather than a PhD.

Records should be kept of any prior communications between applicants and potential supervisors as supporting information for the application for admission and for scholarship applications.

As required by the Higher Degree Research Candidate Supervision Policy, a co-supervisor, joint supervisor or members of supervisory panels must be identified at the time admission is approved.

3.2 Communication plan and research framework

Good practice supervisors will ensure that a clear framework for the supervisory relationship and management of the project is formulated and agreed upon at the commencement of candidature (see Expectations and Communication Plan documents in Appendix B).

Development of a strong framework involves:
- coming to an understanding of mutual expectations, respective roles and responsibilities, and anticipated experiences during candidature. Research and experience indicates that it is valuable to undertake these discussions in the first few months of candidature;
- establishing communication plans that may include:
  - meeting schedules,
  - agreement on expectations of availability of both candidate and supervisor, and
  - arrangements for when the supervisor is on leave;
- ensuring mutual understanding of the stages of the project including setting milestones for:
  - review of the literature,
  - development of the research proposal,
  - provision of drafts and feedback on these drafts, and
  - confirmation or annual review.

Good practice supervision also involves discussion at the start of the candidature on at least the following:
- Research Code of Conduct;
- Ethics;
- Intellectual Property;
- Occupational Health and Safety;
- Plagiarism;
- Skills development required (See Training Needs Analysis document in Appendix C);
- Grievance resolution processes;
- School-specific support information; and
- Resources available to the candidate including desk space and access to computers.

3.3 Milestone setting and progress review

Setting milestones that are appropriate to the stage of the candidature is a recognised approach to assisting and managing progress. For the first stage of research milestones may include:
- determining the gaps in knowledge or selecting suitable topics in the field that will help focus the research and producing a critical literature review;
- formulating a proposal to address these gaps in knowledge or chosen topics;
- conducting preliminary investigations to assess feasibility of approaches.

In the mid-candidature to late candidature stages, appropriate milestones should be regularly set and reviewed.

Supervisors should support candidates to achieve timely progression and completion by:
- establishing agreed research milestones and monitoring these throughout each stage of candidature,
- supporting independent annual monitoring of progress throughout candidature,
- assisting with preparation for annual progress reviews (including confirmation review) and ensuring candidates have a clear understanding of their purpose and benefit,
- re-evaluating needs such as skills development throughout different stages of candidature and planning accordingly,
- re-evaluating meeting schedules and draft feedback processes to reflect different stages of candidature (ie more frequent in early phase, then less frequent as candidature progresses with flexibility depending on candidate circumstances).

Good practice supervisors will encourage and support:

- engagement with the research community both within and outside UNSW;
- development and implementation of an appropriate publication plan;
- attendance and presentation at conferences;
- development of both technical and generic professional skills.

4. Thesis preparation and submission

Good practice supervisors will assess the written and oral communication skills of candidates early in candidatures. They also encourage candidates to start writing as early as possible in the candidature. Supervisors should support development of writing skills where they require improvement. Section 6 details resources that include support for supervisors and candidates. In particular, candidates are encouraged to take advantage of the writing support provided by The Learning Centre.

All supervisors should be familiar with submission and examination processes and timelines and should support candidates in meeting the requirements. Good practice requires supervisors to ensure they will be available at critical times during preparation of thesis drafts. Candidates need to ensure that they have an agreed timeline with their supervisor/s for submission of drafts and feedback on these drafts.

Good practice supervisors will devote considerable effort to selecting and engaging the most appropriate examiners. They will also provide an objective assessment of examiners' reports and assist the candidate in responding to recommendations for revision of a submitted thesis.

4.1 Preparing for careers after graduation

Good practice supervisors provide active mentorship to the candidate to facilitate professional development, particularly in relation to development of generic professional skills and the dissemination of research via conferences and publications.

Good practice supervision includes supporting the candidate in:

- developing a publication plan and building their curriculum vitae;
- attending and presenting at conferences;
- facilitating networking opportunities;
- developing professional skills relevant to their intended career.

5. Managing Candidate Needs and Problem Solving

Good practice supervision involves providing helpful and timely advice and referral when challenges arise throughout a candidature. Excellent supervisors recognise and respond to varying candidate circumstances (illness, personal issues etc) which may arise and are able to establish processes to manage these issues.

Good practice supervisors are familiar with:

- all policy relating to HDR candidates;
- UNSW Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest Policy;
- services and programs available to assist candidates with various issues, eg. counseling services, study skills courses and support for international candidates;
- progress review procedures to ensure clear communication, monitoring and management of a candidate's progress when affected by personal or other issues.

5.1 Conflict of interest

In some instances, problems arise during candidature that directly relate to the candidate–supervisor relationship. Given the power relationship between supervisors and candidates, it is important that supervisors are not conflicted in deciding on what advice to give. Where a supervisor has a potential conflict of interest it must be declared to their Head of School or a person with appropriate authority within UNSW in accordance with the Conflict of Interest Policy.

Good practice supervisors must declare any potential conflicts of interest and advise candidates to seek appropriate independent advice where relevant.

5.2 Diversity of candidates

Good practice supervisors assess candidates' needs on an individual basis and tailor their support plans and identification of training requirements taking these needs into consideration.

5.2.1 International candidates

Supervisors need to be:

- aware of the particular challenges that may be faced by international candidates
- sensitive to the social, academic and intellectual transition issues that international candidates moving to Australia for the first time may experience;
- aware of visa restrictions and the provisions of the ESOS National Code.

5.2.2 Part-time candidates

Supervisors need to be aware of the challenges faced by part-time candidates and that their needs may differ from the needs of full-time candidates.

5.2.3 Candidates with health issues

Supervisors should, in the first instance, encourage candidates with health issues to seek professional assistance and be prepared to discuss the various candidature options available. For example, sick leave, an approved leave of absence or a move from full-time to part-time may assist a candidate to better cope with health problems. Supervisors should seek advice from the University's Counseling Service if managing a candidate suspected of having mental health issues.

6. UNSW Framework for Supervisor and Candidate Support

UNSW provides professional development opportunities and training to ensure that at all levels and stages of experience supervisors are able to evaluate and further develop their supervision skills. Good practice supervisors remain current with the research in their area of expertise, but also stay current with research practice.

6.1 Resources

Supervisor Workshops

This program consists of a series of workshops on how to supervise higher degree research candidates at UNSW. It provides an overview of the relevant policies, practices and tools necessary for competent and successful supervision. Participants will meet key personnel from the Graduate Research School, as well as supervisors with a reputation for excellence in supervision. Workshop topics include:

- UNSW Higher Degree Research Policy Workshop
- Effective Annual Reviews Workshop
- Working with Part-time and/or Off-campus Candidates
- Providing Quality Advice on Candidate's Writing
- Supervising International Research Candidates
- How to Examine a Doctoral Thesis

Other Resources

A range of resources are available for supervisors and candidates including:

- the Graduate Research School's Resources and Training website
- the Researcher Development Unit
- the Learning Centre's Postgraduate Research Students Support website
- GREIM (Global Research Ethics and Integrity Module)

This ethics module developed by U21 partners is available to UNSW staff and students.

- fIRST

UNSW subscribes to the fIRST (for Improving Research Supervision and Training) website. This website provides access to a range of resources which can be used by supervisors, postgraduate coordinators and students.

7. Acknowledgements

Discussion and documentation on supervision and candidature management with Group of Eight Graduate Schools and equivalent, in particular the Australian National University and the University of Queensland.

Discussion and documentation on supervision and candidature management with the U21 Universities, in particular The University of Birmingham.

This document draws on the following references:

Supervising Doctorates Downunder [Ed: Carey Denholm and Terry Evans] – available to borrow from the Graduate Research School

A supervisory Framework from http://researchsuper.cedam.anu.edu.au

Nature's Guide for Mentors:
http://www.grs.unsw.edu.au/downloads/Guide%20for%20Mentors%20Published.pdf

Appendix A: History

Version	Authorised by	Approval Date	Effective Date	Sections modified
1.0	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)	9 August 2010	9 August 2010	This is a new document

Appendix B: Expectations and Communication Plan Guides

SUPERVISION EXPECTATIONS

Read each pair of statements below and then estimate your position on each. For example with statement 1 if you believe very strongly that it is the supervisor's responsibility to select a good topic you would put a ring around '1'. If you think that both the supervisor and student should equally be involved you should put a ring round '3' and if you think it is definitely the student's responsibility to select a topic, put a ring round '5'.

1. It is the supervisor's responsibility to select a research topic	1 2 3 4 5			The student is responsible for selecting her/his own topic
2. The supervisor should insist on regular meetings with the student	1 2 3 4 5			The student should decide when she/he wants to meet with the supervisor
3. It is the supervisor who decides which theoretical framework or methodology is most appropriate	1 2 3 4 5			Students should decide which theoretical framework or methodology they wish to use
4. The supervisor should check regularly that the student is working consistently and on task	1 2 3 4 5			The student should work independently and not have to account for how and where time is spent
5. The supervisor should develop an appropriate program and timetable of research and study for the student	1 2 3 4 5			The supervisor should leave the development of the program of study to the student
6. The supervisor is responsible for providing emotional support & encouragement to the student	1 2 3 4 5			Students should have their own support networks and this is not the responsibility of the supervisor
7. The supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the student is introduced to the appropriate services and facilities of the department and University	1 2 3 4 5			It is the student's responsibility to ensure that she/he has located and accessed all relevant services and facilities for research
8. The supervisor should insist on seeing all drafts of work to ensure that the student is on the right track	1 2 3 4 5			Students should submit drafts of work only when they want constructive criticism from the supervisor
9. Supervisors should only accept students when they have specific knowledge of the student's chosen topic	1 2 3 4 5			Supervisors should feel free to accept students, even if they do not have specific knowledge of the student's topic
10. The supervisor should assist in the writing of the thesis if necessary	1 2 3 4 5			The writing of the thesis should only ever be the student's own work
11. A warm, friendly relationship between supervisor and student is critical for successful candidature	1 2 3 4 5			A warm, friendly relationship is inadvisable because it may obstruct objectivity for both student and supervisor during candidature
12. The supervisor is responsible for decisions regarding the standard of the thesis	1 2 3 4 5			The student is responsible for decisions concerning the standard of the thesis

To download go to http://researchsuper.cedam.anu.edu.au/candidature/getting-started/clarifying-expectations

Adapted by Margaret Kiley & Kate Cadman (1997) from work by Brown, G. & Atkins, M. (1988). *Effective teaching in higher education.* Methuen, London. pp. 146-147

Appendix B: Expectations and Communication Plan Guides

COMMENCEMENT MEETING RECORD AND COMMUNICATION PLAN

This document is designed as a tool to assist HDR candidates and supervisors in developing a framework for the supervisory relationship and management of the project at the commencement of candidature. It should be used in parallel with the Expectations document.

Student Name:_____   **Supervisor Name:**_____

Date of Meeting:_____   **Date of Commencement:**_____

1. Meeting Schedules and Milestones. Effective supervision depends on regular interaction between candidates and supervisors. The frequency and type of such interactions varies considerably between individuals.

a) **Meeting Schedule.** At the commencement of candidature it is recommended that a meeting schedule be mapped out for the year ahead. The following table may be used as a starting point for discussion and recording of meeting schedules. This should be revisited in second year and beyond as appropriate.

Stage of Research	Meeting Timing
Year 1. Activities and Milestones	
Example only:*Literature review/topic decision (~1 to 4 months)	*Meet at group meeting weekly and twice/week on an individual basis*
Development of research proposal (~1 to 6 months)	
Proposal defence presentation (4 to 9 months)	
Other....	
End Year 1. Confirmation (for PhD and Masters transferring to PhD)	
Year 2. Activities and Milestones	
Year 3. Activities and Milestones	
Preparing for Thesis Submission	

* text in grey is example only - add or delete milestones and tasks in the table as appropriate

b) **Attendance expectations.** Candidates and supervisors should discuss and come to a mutual agreement on attendance on campus and expected hours/week on research.

_____

_____

_____

c) **Leave.** Candidates and supervisors should discuss and come to a mutual agreement on expectations relating to recreation and other leave for the candidate and the arrangements for an alternate supervisor during leave or absence of the supervisor as appropriate.

_____

_____

_____

2. Milestone setting
Candidates and supervisors should come to a mutual agreement on the project goals, research plan and milestones for each stage of the research. These can be used as starting points for each stage of research and may change throughout the year. The Table above may also assist in documenting milestones. They may also form a basis for the Annual Progress Review.

HDR CANDIDATE COMMENCEMENT CHECKLIST

Supervisors are expected to be familiar with the Research Code of Conduct, Staff Code of Conduct (including Conflict of Interest Policy) and all policy relating to HDR candidates. The following checklist provides a guide to the essential points that should be discussed with candidates at commencement.

- ☐ Research Code of Conduct

- ☐ Ethics (both for support of research protocols and for conduct of research)

- ☐ Procedure for Handling Research Material and Data

- ☐ Authorship and Procedure for Resolving Disputes between Authors

- ☐ Conflict of Interest

- ☐ Occupational Health and Safety

- ☐ Intellectual Property

- ☐ Other Policy relating to HDR candidates

- ☐ Plagiarism

- ☐ Skills development

- ☐ Grievance resolution processes

- ☐ School-specific support information

- ☐ Resources available to the candidate including travel funding

- ☐ Research Student Handbook

- ☐ *Add others key discussion points as required......*

- ☐ *Add others key discussion points as required......*

- ☐ *Add others key discussion points as required......*

Appendix C: Training Needs Analysis Guide

TRAINING NEEDS ANALYSIS FOR HDR CANDIDATES

Name of Student: _____ Name of Supervisor: _____ No. of Semesters Completed: _____

Project Title:_____

Degree/Program Code:_____/_____

Training Category	Training Completed Previously[1]	Future Training Required[2]	Plan[3]
1. Discipline Knowledge Note: Formal coursework in this category should be minor since the expectation is that appropriate discipline knowledge is considered a prerequisite to admission. Discipline knowledge training that may be relevant includes training on specific equipment and specific inductions into studio, laboratory or workshop use. Attendance at conferences may also be included.			
2. Generic Research Skills Note: This category includes formal coursework and informal training in skills required to conduct research that may be relevant across disciplines. This includes gaining skills in literature reviews, data management, legal and ethical issues, bibliographic software, statistical methods, experimental design, qualitative research methods and information technology (IT).			

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[1] outline existing skills within the Training Category and any evidence that they were undertaken (if applicable)
[2] list ideas and wish lists on which to base your training plan which can be revisited at the start of each year
[3] list formal courses and informal training planned for the next 12 months and when they will be undertaken

Training Category	Training Completed Previously	Future Training Required	Plan
3. Generic Personal and Professional Skills Note: Training in this category is independent of the discipline area. Such training includes oral and written communication skills, teamwork, leadership, career management, commercialisation and innovation.			
4. Additional Communication Skills Note: Some HDR candidates may experience difficulties in writing and communicating for a variety of reasons. Supervisors should advise candidates on the appropriate help and support to address this.			
5. Any other relevant training			

Signature_____(Candidate)   Signature_____(Supervisor)

_____(Date)   _____ (Date)