ROLE OF POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH COORDINATOR

RESOLVED AB03/53

That the Academic Board approves the Guidelines for the Generic Roles and Responsibilities for the School Postgraduate Research Coordinator and Guidelines for Generic Administrative Support Requirements for Postgraduate Research Coordination in Schools.

Generic Administrative Support Requirements for Postgraduate Research Coordination in Schools.

(NB. Generic Guidelines Only: It is noted that individual School and Faculty set-ups vary markedly across the University, and particularly between large and small schools. This document is therefore intended to provide generic guidelines only so that schools may adapt it as required for their specific circumstances. As these are guidelines only, Schools should consult with Human Resources if they intend to prepare a formal Position Description.)

A. Position Purpose

The role of the Administrative Assistant to the Postgraduate Research Coordinator (PGRC) is to provide assistance and support to the PGRC to ensure effective management of postgraduate research within the School.

The PGRC is responsible for coordinating and administering the School's postgraduate research programs. The PGRC plays a major role in all stages of postgraduate research supervision, from recruitment to graduation. The PGRC is responsible for overseeing the candidature of each research student in the School. The PGRC advises supervisors regarding aspects of supervision, and research students regarding aspects of their candidature.

B. PGRC Administrative Assistant Responsibilities

Duties may include:

- **Act as School's first point of contact for prospective research students** and filter enquiries through to PGRC. (Provide timely first-stage advice and information to prospective research students regarding application procedures, sources of financial support, scholarship applications, and condition of studies.)

- **Establish / maintain a departmental data base** which will log all applications and details about recommendations, and outcome of application. Track progress of application form until research student has been approved or rejected and report outcomes to PGRC.
Support PGRC in providing information regarding postgraduate research degrees for various UNSW and Faculty publications, including School website.

Assist PGRC with research orientation / induction activities within the School, and publicise UNSW induction programs, such as the UNSW Orientation Day.

Assist PGRC in coordination and scheduling of postgraduate research seminars and other activities including training opportunities. (eg organise review committee meetings and ensure submission of reports)

Manage maintenance of up-to-date records of research students (e.g., contact details, scholarship holders etc) and their progress (e.g., outcome of reviews); liaise with Scholarships, Loans and Research Students Office (SLARSO) re. student records.

Assist PGRC with coordination and follow-up of Progress Reviews.

Research student pastoral (social service) support: Refer student to relevant student service unit when they have personal, financial, health or other non-academic issues (or handle first enquiries regarding these issues).

Assist PGRC in ensuring (with the supervisor) that research students are aware of:
  - their rights and responsibilities (as set out in the School manual)
  - the essential School and University facilities and services, essential regulations (e.g., progress milestones)
  - roles of various individuals within the School and within the University

Assist PGRC in allocation / management of postgraduate research student spaces/resources – rooms, desks, computers etc.

C. Selection Criteria

Please note: The skills requirements for administrative assistants to PGRCs will vary from School to School across the University. Human Resources has not been consulted regarding the Selection Criteria outlined below, as these are intended to be generic guidelines only. Schools should consult with HR if they intend to prepare a formal Position Description.

Essential Criteria

1. Good interpersonal skills including experience in communicating with people from diverse backgrounds.

2. Excellent organisational and administrative skills.
3. Experience in supporting and maintaining workflow in a busy office environment.
4. Highly developed written and oral expression.
5. Experience with database management and software packages.

Desirable Criteria

1. Knowledge of grievance resolution procedures (training may be required).
2. Knowledge of the training experience undertaken by HDR students.
3. Knowledge of the policies governing HDR students including the issues that routinely effect students arising from these issues.
4. Knowledge of relevant University administrative systems – eg NSS or other relevant administrative systems (training may be required).

Appointment Level

NB. As these are guidelines only, Schools should consult with Human Resources regarding the level of the position if they intend to prepare a formal Position Description.

I. Basic administrative work - Level 4.
II. As a central contact person for postgraduates - Level 5 or 6.

Percentage of Administrative Role Devoted to Support of Postgraduate Research Coordinator

I. This should be part of a full-time position that may involve other responsibilities e.g. postgraduate coursework or undergraduate administration, school recruitment etc). The administrative assistant should be readily available and easily accessible every day of the week to the Postgraduate Research Coordinator, students and supervisors.

II. For the 'base unit' of 50 postgraduate research students, a minimum of 40% of the administrative assistant's time would be required.
Generic Roles and Responsibilities for School Postgraduate Research Coordinator

(NB. Generic Guidelines Only: It is noted that individual School and Faculty set-ups vary markedly across the University, and particularly between large and small schools. This document is therefore intended to provide generic guidelines only so that schools may adapt it as required for their specific circumstances.)

A. Position Purpose

• The Postgraduate Research Coordinator (PGRC) is responsible for coordinating and administering the School's postgraduate research programs.

• The PGRC should be responsible for School level management of all stages of postgraduate research candidature, from recruitment to graduation and should be proactive in policy formation and implementation.

• The PGRC should advise supervisors regarding aspects of supervision, and research students regarding aspects of their candidature.

B. Supervision Stages - PGRC Responsibilities

The responsibilities of the PGRC relevant to each stage of supervision.

Pre-enrolment (Recruitment/Selection)

1. Manage recruitment and selection at the School level
   - manage School’s inquiries from prospective research students (where relevant establish effective procedures for administrative staff to deal with and filter first enquiries)
   - manage procedures for provision of advice and information to prospective research students regarding application procedures, scholarship applications, and condition of studies (where relevant to be undertaken by administrative staff)
   - facilitate / encourage student-supervisor contact

2. Oversee the processing of research student admissions and scholarship applications. (Where relevant to be supported by administrative staff.)

3. Oversee follow-up of research student enquiries and applications. Establish / maintain a departmental data base which will log all applications and details about recommendations, and outcome of application (where relevant, administrative support staff should be assigned responsibility for database).

4. Manage provision of information regarding postgraduate research degrees for various UNSW and Faculty publications, including School website. (Where relevant to be supported by administrative staff.)
Induction

1. The PGRC should oversee the research student orientation / induction activities and processes within the School, and publicise UNSW induction programs, such as the UNSW Welcome Day for new research students. (Should have appropriate administrative support for this activity.)

2. Ensure (with the supervisor) that systems are in place and resources available so that research students are aware of:
   - their rights and responsibilities (as set out in the School manual)
   - the essential School and University facilities and services, essential regulations (e.g., progress milestones)
   - roles of various individuals within the School and within the University
   (Where relevant to be supported by administrative staff.)
   (NB – the supervisor should have responsibility for ensuring that the student is able to apply this information to their own individual circumstances.)

3. Facilitate the raising and resolution of ethical/IP issues in general and in individual postgraduate research. (Where relevant to be supported by administrative staff.)

Progress

1. Manage maintenance of up-to-date records of research students (e.g., contact details) and their progress (e.g., outcome of reviews); liaise with Scholarships, Loans and Research Students Office (SLARSO) re. student records. (Administrative support staff should be available to manage the database.)

2. Overview Progress Reviews. Manage School postgraduate research seminars and progress review committee meetings (unless there are alternative School procedures). Act upon and follow-up committee decisions. (Where relevant to be supported by administrative staff.)

3. Contribute to the development of the research culture in the School by facilitating contacts among postgraduate students, and between postgraduate students and other academic staff (e.g. by overseeing staff / student seminars etc). (Where relevant to be supported by administrative staff.)

4. Research student support: With the supervisor (and supervisory committee), liaise with other UNSW units (e.g., library, computing services, SLARSO) where necessary to support postgraduate research activity, allocation of minimum resources (include space, IT resources etc). Infrastructure needs and ethical issues should be negotiated at the outset of candidature and at every review stage. (Where relevant to be supported by administrative staff.)
5. **Research student pastoral (social service) support:** Refer student to relevant student service unit when they have personal, financial, health or other non-academic issues. *(Where relevant, initial enquiries to be handled by appropriately skilled / trained administrative support staff.)*

Grievance

1. "Be available to research students as a first point of reference beyond their supervisors for problems that can not be resolved or for those that involve details of postgraduate research education that are unknown by supervisors" *(Curtin University of Technology Handbook of Guidelines and Regulations for Higher Degrees in Research).* In general, be familiar with and follow University and School regulations / guidelines regarding grievance resolution. *(NB. Grievance advice provided by PGRCs is expected to be on an informal basis only.)*

2. Refer persistent supervisor problems to the HOS.

Examination

1. **Oversee most aspects of the examination process.** *(Where relevant to be supported by administrative staff.)*

Faculty Committees

1. **Attendance at relevant Committees (eg Higher Degree or Research)**

Reporting

1. **Prepare an annual report** to the Head of School and Higher Degree Committee highlighting statistical data on supervisor reports, issues etc.

C. **Relationships** *(Direction and Support)*

- The role of coordinating postgraduate research programs has been delegated to the PGRC by the Head of School.

- The HOS should direct, and the PGRC should advise supervisors regarding aspects of supervision, and students regarding aspects of their candidature.

- The HOS should be available to support and assist the Coordinator, particularly with supervisor difficulties.

- When allocating workloads, the HOS should bear in mind that the role of PGRC is laborious and time consuming.

- In most schools, a Postgraduate Research Committee should support the work of the Coordinator.
• The PGRC should regularly update the HOS and School about postgraduate research student matters.

• In most cases, administrative support staff should be assigned on a part-time basis to support this role.

• At the Faculty level, the Associate Dean Research (or equivalent) should liaise with and support the activities of the School PGRCs.

D. Responsibilities of the School / Faculty / University

1. The PGRC should be provided with adequate training.
   • Each Faculty/School should develop guidelines for PGRC training (e.g., attend annual PGRC workshops organized by SDU and/or the Faculty; attend the first UNSW Orientation Day that occurs during their tenure as PGRC);
   • The HOS should ensure that the new PGRC receives adequate hand-over / training of approximately six months from the previous PGRC. This could be facilitated by the existence of a School Higher Degree Committee, whereby a member of the HDC could become the replacement PGRC. Alternatively, if not a member of the HDC, the replacement PGRC could attend HDC meetings during previous PGRC tenure).
   • There should be specific training of PGRCs in grievance resolution, and in ethical/IP issues.

2. There should be intra-School workload recognition for the heavy administrative load of PGRCs.
   • There should be adequate (depending on size etc of School) and clearly assigned and defined administrative assistance provided to the PGRC.

3. The PGRC should be provided, by the School, with:
   • a computer with email/internet/NSS access; an answering machine/voice-mail facility; noticeboard/newsletter access, phone with STD access, access to fax, access to ISD phone in the School.

4. SLARSO should further develop the annually produced Postgraduate Research Coordinators Handbook. This could be done in consultation and collaboration with the Office of Research Training, and produced as an electronic document, as well as in hard copy. (The ‘Generic Roles and Responsibilities for School Postgraduate Research Coordinators’ and ‘Generic Administrative Support Requirements’ guidelines should be included in the Handbook.) Each Faculty/School/Department should have its own specific elaborations of the UNSW handbook.
E. Desirable Skills

*Please note:* The skills requirements for postgraduate research coordinators will vary from School to School across the University. The list below is intended to outline some generic skills which may be of use as a starting point for Schools who wish to develop their own Position Descriptions. Human Resources has not been consulted regarding this list, as it is intended to be generic only. Schools should however consult with Human Resources if they intend to prepare a formal Position Description.

Desirable skills for PGRCs may include:

1. Good interpersonal skills including experience in communicating with people from diverse backgrounds.
2. Good organisational and management skills.
3. Knowledge of the training experience undertaken by HDR students.
4. Knowledge of the policies governing HDR students including the issues that routinely effect students arising from these issues.
5. A knowledge of grievance resolution procedures.

F. Level of Position

Schools should consult with Human Resources regarding the level of the position if they intend to prepare a formal Position Description.

This document is drawn from:

1. *Optimising Supervision of Postgraduate Research in the Scientific and Technological Disciplines*  
   Chapter: Postgraduate Research Coordinator: Role and Responsibilities  
   Subcommittee: Cranney, Greenfield, Guilhaus, Hazell, Swarbrick  
   Author: Cranney

2. Duties of the Postgraduate Research Coordinator position description, Faculty of the Built Environment, Dr Bill Lawson, 2002

3. Discussion arising from Meeting of the Postgraduate Research Interest Group, Thursday 13 February, 2003 regarding the role of the postgraduate research coordinator.