



Code of practice for supervision of postgraduate research students

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Introduction

The University of Sydney is an institution of higher education at which research and research training of the highest national and international quality are pre-eminent responsibilities. The University has a responsibility to ensure that candidates for higher degrees work in an appropriate intellectual and academic environment. A postgraduate research candidature involves a commitment from the student, the supervisor and the University which will extend over years. In this context the University has defined the minimum responsibilities of all parties concerned with the supervision of postgraduate research candidates in the following guidelines. These have to be read in conjunction with the University's regulations for particular degrees and the defined roles of heads of departments and schools, deans and faculties and colleges.

A. Responsibilities at University level

The University has the responsibility:

- (a) to ensure that adequate University policies in respect of postgraduate supervision are developed and kept under review and are effectively promulgated;
- (b) to ensure that candidates have an acceptable level of access to physical space and other facilities, including library facilities, and that departments advise prospective candidates of what facilities will be made available;
- (c) to ensure that adequate support services in areas such as learning assistance are available;
- (d) to ensure that adequate training and other support is provided for supervisors of postgraduate students;
- (e) to ensure that clear policies exist with respect to the intellectual property rights of students and staff;
- (f) to ensure throughout the candidature that there are effective reporting and review mechanisms in place and that there are procedures to allow candidates to seek assistance in the resolution of difficulties;
- (g) to ensure that the examining process for postgraduate candidates is both expeditious and maintains the standards required for the degrees concerned;
- (h) to ensure that adequate appeal mechanisms exist;
- (i) to provide adequate resources for handling the administrative implications of this Code of Practice.

B. Responsibilities at the faculty or college level

The faculty or college has the responsibility:

- (a) to ensure that applicants for admission to candidature are properly qualified both with respect to the minimum requirements for admission to the degree concerned and with respect to the particular course of study proposed;
- (b) to ensure that facilities required for any particular candidature are available or will be available before approving the admission of particular candidates;

- (c) to ensure that the supervisor and associate supervisor recommended are properly qualified and that where it is proposed that a supervisor supervise more than five candidates an adequate justification is provided;
- (d) to ensure that appropriate review mechanisms exist within departments and that departments are properly advising candidates of their rights and obligations;
- (e) to monitor the progress of postgraduate candidates during the whole candidature through reports from departments and to intervene if necessary;
- (f) to ensure that candidates within the faculty or college are aware of persons within the faculty or college to whom they can turn for advice;
- (g) to ensure that the annual attendance requirements established for each candidate comply with any faculty policy and are generally seen to be satisfactory;
- (h) to ensure that examiners recommended are appropriately qualified and that the examination process is both expeditious and maintains the standards required for the degree concerned.

C. Responsibilities at the departmental level

These responsibilities are those of the head of department. They may, however, in many instances be delegated to a postgraduate coordinator or may be exercised through a departmental committee. Such delegations must be clearly defined.

The department has the responsibility:

- (a) to ensure that applicants for admission to candidature are properly qualified both with respect to the minimum requirements for admission to the degree concerned and with respect to the particular course of study proposed and that they have had appropriate discussions/correspondence concerning their proposed course of study;
- (b) to determine the facilities likely to be required for any particular candidature and to ascertain whether they will be available and whether the project proposed is appropriate to the degree;
- (c) to ensure that applicants are correctly advised as to the availability of facilities including access to physical space and other resources and are correctly advised as to the financial support that is likely to be available to them;
- (d) to ensure that adequate appropriate supervision can be made available for any particular candidature, for monitoring the supervision load of members of staff within the department, for ensuring that proper recognition of that load is given in the overall allocation of duties within the department and to ensure that the candidate receives proper supervision throughout the candidature;
- (e) to ensure that the respective role of supervisors and associate supervisors is properly defined and understood and that they have access to information defining their responsibilities;
- (f) to encourage supervisors and associate supervisors to participate in supervision training activities provided within the University;
- (g) to ensure that candidates are provided with written information concerning departmental facilities and requirements including reference to arrangements for alternative channels of problem resolution and the various review mechanisms that operate within the department;
- (h) to ensure that opportunities exist within the department or the faculty for interaction and development of profitable intellectual relationships amongst students and staff and that all students are encouraged to participate in appropriate departmental or faculty activities;
- (i) to ensure that students are encouraged to participate in appropriate training activities offered within the University;
- (j) to ensure that review procedures as required by the University are carried out properly; the load that participation in such activities places on members of staff must be recognised within the department;

- (k) to ensure that appropriate alternative supervision is provided during absences from the University of the supervisor; an acting supervisor should be appointed when the supervisor will be absent for periods of absence of a month or more, including during the thesis examination period;
- (l) to ensure that where a postgraduate coordinator or equivalent has been appointed the duties and responsibilities of the position are properly defined, adequate resources are provided to assist in the performance of those duties and proper recognition is given to the workload these duties entail;
- (m) to ensure that necessary approvals are obtained from the faculty in respect of conditions of candidatures, that scholarship reporting requirements are met and that candidates receive all due entitlements;
- (n) to ensure that the examination process is conducted promptly in an expeditious and correct manner; this includes early selection of appropriate examiners;
- (o) to ensure that students and supervisors are aware of the University's policies and procedures with respect to intellectual property, including questions of authorship and exploitation of inventions and other intellectual property.

D. Responsibilities of the supervisor

1. The supervisor has a responsibility before undertaking the supervision of any candidature:
 - (a) to ensure to the best of his or her ability that the candidate is prima facie capable of undertaking the project proposed and that the proposed supervisor is both suitably qualified to carry out the supervision and has sufficient time available;
 - (b) to ensure that the facilities are available to enable the project to succeed; the supervisor should pay particular attention to the likely time scale of the project bearing in mind that a three-year (full-time equivalent) PhD candidature should be an objective.

If the supervisor is not confident at this stage that the research proposal is likely to succeed or that the facilities are available or has any doubts about his or her ability for any reason to supervise the candidate he or she must raise this with the head of department, postgraduate coordinator and/or faculty. A decision should then be made as to whether the candidature may proceed or whether the candidate might be better supervised by another person or require the assistance of an associate supervisor. Particularly careful attention must be paid to proposals for part-time candidature.

2. Where the supervisor of a research student has any interest in a company that has contracted with the University to do research involving research students, the supervisor must declare this interest to the department and the student before embarking on a research program.
3. The supervisor has a responsibility:
 - (a) to ensure that the candidate is aware of the standards expected for the degree concerned and for identifying with the candidate the particular research skills that will need to be acquired and the most appropriate data-gathering and analysing techniques;
 - (b) for reaching agreement with the candidate on the contact that will be necessary between them both in general terms and quite specifically for the first year of a PhD candidature or first semester of a master's candidature; this will include agreement upon indicators of progress being made and submission of appropriate written work, interim reports or research results. Written work is to be returned by the supervisor with constructive criticism within one month or a shorter agreed time;
 - (c) to ensure that the candidate participates in the work of the department including presentations at departmental seminars.

4. The supervisor has a responsibility especially over the initial phase of candidature to ensure that facilities identified as necessary do eventuate, to encourage the candidate to extend his or her contacts within the department and elsewhere, to encourage the candidate to make productive use of his or her time and to ensure that commitments made in respect of availability and contact are met by both parties.
5. The supervisor has a responsibility:
 - (a) to provide feedback on progress to the candidate and to make annual progress reports to faculty, to any scholarship authority and, after the first twelve months, to the departmental review committee;
 - (b) to ensure that the candidate is made aware of inadequate progress or of standards of work below that generally expected, to identify the problems and to suggest ways of addressing them.
6. The supervisor has a responsibility, as the candidature progresses, to negotiate different contact arrangements as may be appropriate. The supervisor should ensure that both candidate and supervisor have clarified what each expects of the other.
7. The supervisor has a responsibility to ensure that he or she gives appropriate and timely advice on requirements regarding content, style, presentation and production of theses. She or he should also give prompt feedback on drafts submitted.
8. The supervisor has a responsibility, with the candidate, to monitor progress made within the context of the overall research plan and to ensure that sufficient time is left for writing up the thesis and that, if necessary, the scope of the project is reduced to meet the time available.
9. The supervisor has a responsibility:
 - (a) to identify the various degree and other administrative requirements and to advise the candidate as necessary; he or she should ensure that necessary approvals are sought for absences from the University by the candidate and that the candidate receives any due entitlements from the department;
 - (b) to advise each candidate of applicable government and institutional guidelines for the conduct of research, including requirements relating to ethical approvals for studies on human or animal subjects, and the use of potentially hazardous agents; reference should be made to the AVCC Guidelines for Responsible Practice in Research and Dealing with Problems of Research Misconduct; as far as possible, research supervisors should ensure that the work submitted by candidates is their own and that data are valid;
 - (c) to ensure that the candidate is aware of the requirements regarding the retention of data within departments and the requirements of members of staff to complete a statement of authorship in respect of each paper submitted for publication;
 - (d) to ensure that safe working practices are developed and maintained and that the candidate is aware of the University's Occupational Health and Safety Policies.
10. The supervisor has a responsibility, where an associate supervisor has been appointed:
 - (a) to ensure that responsibilities are clearly understood by all three parties and should maintain regular contact with the associate supervisor;
 - (b) to ensure that the direction of the work is entirely under the control of the University and the candidate.
11. The supervisor has a responsibility to ensure that an acting supervisor is appointed during her or his absence from the University for any period of a month or more, including during the thesis examination period. He or she should inform such an acting supervisor about the progress of the candidature.
12. The supervisor has a responsibility to give thought to the suitability and availability of examiners in good time before the thesis is submitted and to advise the head of department of the necessity to take action.

13. The supervisor has a responsibility, when the thesis is submitted, to certify whether the thesis is acceptable for examination. This is usually done in the form of a letter to the Registrar stating that the particular thesis is in a form of presentation suitable for examination. This is not an expression of opinion about the merit of the work.
14. The supervisor has a responsibility to reach agreement with the candidate concerning authorship of publications and acknowledgement of contributions during and after the candidature. There should be open and mutual recognition of the candidate's and supervisor's contribution on all published work arising from the project.
15. The supervisor has a responsibility to be aware of the problem-solving mechanisms and the support services for students which exist within the University and should ensure that the head of department and the faculty or college are kept informed as necessary if problems occur during the candidature.
16. The supervisor has a responsibility to ensure that the candidate is aware of his or her rights with respect to intellectual property and to encourage, where appropriate, the exploitation of such intellectual property through the University.

E. Responsibilities of the candidate

1. The candidate has a responsibility:
 - (a) to play an informed part in the process of the selection and appointment of the supervisor;
 - (b) to plan and execute the project within the time limits defined for the degree in question;
 - (c) to devote sufficient appropriate time to the candidature;
 - (d) to establish with his or her supervisor agreed methods of working and then to fulfil his or her side of any agreement;
 - (e) to attend as agreed for consultation and provide evidence of the progress being made including submission of any required report forms;
 - (f) to undertake any coursework or other activities required by the supervisor or head of department;
 - (g) to participate in the opportunities offered by the department to be part of that intellectual community; the candidate must participate in such departmental activities as are required;
 - (h) to draw the supervisor's attention to difficulties being experienced, to be aware of the mechanisms that exist for helping with supervisor-candidate difficulties and to take advantage of them if necessary;
 - (i) to ensure that there is sufficient time allocated to write up the thesis and to ascertain what is necessary in terms of content, style and presentation.
2. The candidate has a responsibility:
 - (a) to be familiar with both the legislative requirements for the degree in which he or she is enrolled and any departmental, faculty or other University written guidelines relating to that degree or to postgraduate work in general;
 - (b) to be familiar with government and institutional guidelines for the conduct of research and to ensure that through the supervisor the necessary approvals for studies on animal or human subjects (including the use of questionnaires) are obtained;
 - (c) to adopt at all times safe working practices relevant to the field of the research and to take note of the University's Occupational Health and Safety Policies;
 - (d) to apply for any faculty or departmental approvals needed to spend time away from the University, whether as part of the candidature or under some form of suspension;
 - (e) to ensure that all the administrative requirements of the faculty and the University, such as re-enrolling each year, are met;
 - (f) to give three months' notice to the supervisor of the expected submission date of the thesis in order to allow early selection of examiners.

3. The candidate is solely responsible for the content, style and presentation, and for the production, of the thesis that is finally presented.
4. The candidate has a responsibility to make any emendations required after examination in a timely fashion.
5. The candidate has a responsibility to explore with the supervisor and the University the possible exploitation of any invention or other intellectual property arising from the research.