Key Responsibilities in Research Degrees Management and Supervision

Context and Purpose

The University of South Australia (UniSA) is an Australian leader in innovative research conducted in partnership with industry and the professions. Research degree students, as research trainees, contribute to the University's research culture and research outcomes.

Integral to a quality research education experience is the provision of effective research degree management and supervision. Research degree supervisors (supervisors) play a central role in guiding research degree students in their research project, ensuring they meet milestones and complete their degrees on time. Responsibility for students' progress is shared across the University and this Guideline outlines the respective responsibilities of students and staff involved in the management and administration of research degrees.

A. The University

1. The University has established the Research Degrees Committee (RDC), a sub-committee of Research Leadership Committee, which has the delegated authority in matters relating to research education and training. [View the Terms of Reference.]

2. The University aims to foster and preserve the scholarly values of curiosity, experimentation, critical appraisal and integrity and to foster these values in its research degree students. All students and supervisors are required to comply with:

    a. Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (Australian Code)

    b. National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (National Statement)

    c. AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research

    d. Australian Code of Practice for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes

    e. Gene Technology Act and Regulations

    f. Defence Trade Controls Act

    g. Sexual Harm Policy and Procedures

    h. Universities Australia Principles for Respectful Supervisory Relationships

    i. Australian Council of Graduate Research Good Practice Guidelines for Disclosing and Managing Interests in Graduate Research

    j. University policies and procedures related to Responsible Practice in Research Refer to Policy RES-1 Responsible Practice in Research, Procedure AB-58 P7: Research Degrees Student Research Misconduct, and Appendix AB-58 AD3: Research Misconduct.

B. Responsibilities of Research Degrees Committee

3. Research Degrees Committee (RDC) is responsible for reviewing the quality assurance framework for research degrees management and supervision (refer to [Policy AB-63: Quality Assurance and Improvement in Research Degrees](#)). The management of research degree programs is generally devolved to the Academic Unit level.

4. The quality assurance framework will ensure that:

    a. requirements and entry standards for the research degree are clearly specified and are set to ensure that enrolling research degree students are likely to have the capacity to succeed, given their own commitment to complete;

    b. rights and responsibilities of research degree students, the University, Academic Units, Institutes and their staff are clearly documented and readily available to students, including policy and procedures governing the degree, progress reporting and, where appropriate, scholarship conditions;

    c. appropriate training in relation to responsible conduct of research is made available to all research degree students;

    d. standards exist for qualifications, training and support of academic staff who supervise research degree students, and that a process exists by which assistance may be sought should it be required;

    e. research degree students have access to adequate support, facilities and resources for conducting their research education and training, including research and transferrable skills development activities through [UniSA*EDGE*](#);

    f. the status of intellectual property and commercial considerations arising from research degree students' research are defined and available to students;

    g. procedures are in place by which either the research degree student or the supervisor may raise and seek resolution of grievances or appeals;

    h. there are explicit procedures for the examination process, including clear guidelines for examiners and other parties, outlining institutional expectations for the particular degree and any requirements for confidentiality;

    i. completion times are monitored; and

    j. RDC certifies each research degree student's completion of requirements for the award of a research degree and for recommending to Council that research degrees be awarded.

C. Responsibilities of Deans of Research

5. Each Academic Unit has a research committee, the Chair of which is the Dean of Research. Each Academic Unit research committee is responsible for monitoring and ensuring the effective conduct of research education management within the area and for ensuring that the area adheres to relevant policies, procedures and codes. The Dean of Research is required to complete authorisations at various points of candidature in accordance with research degree policies and procedures, but may delegate responsibility for day-to-day administration and management of research degree students to a Professorial Lead with portfolio responsibility for research degrees in the Academic Unit.

6. The Dean of Research will appoint an academic University staff member with established and recognised experience in supervision to act as Research Degree Coordinator(s) who will represent the area as a member of the Academic Unit research committee.

7. Through the Academic Unit research committee, the Dean of Research (or delegate) will:

    a. actively participate in the development and implementation of strategic initiatives of the University within the relevant Academic Unit, and dissemination of information about such initiatives;

    b. make decisions and recommendations on matters pertaining to postgraduate research including research degree student admissions, scholarships, research proposal assessments, performance reviews, variations to candidature and examinations;

    c. work with the Research Degree Coordinator(s) to oversee matters related to the management and supervision of research degree students;

    d. monitor and report on research degree student progress within the Academic Unit;

    e. report on corporate planning targets and quality assurance mechanisms within the Academic Unit;

    f. determine whether University staff members meet the eligibility criteria to supervise at the relevant level, in accordance with Policy AB-64: Supervision of Research Degree Students;

    g. ensure each Supervisory Panel includes a minimum of three people (refer to Procedure AB-58 P2 Research Degrees Supervision) and also ensure that all academic supervisors are sufficiently expert in the area of research in order to provide the research degree student quality supervision;

    h. make every endeavour to locate another supervisor in the event that alternative supervisory arrangements are required;

    i. provide a research-rich education environment by contributing towards the development and delivery of research and transferrable skills development activities; to foster the development of Research Degree Graduate Qualities and productive intellectual, professional and ethical relationships between University staff and research degree students and external members of a student's Supervisory Panel and among students; and

    j. address grievances or appeals involving Research Degree Coordinators, supervisors and research degree students in accordance with University policy and regulations.

8. The Dean of Research (or delegate) is responsible for:

   a. ensuring that adequate resources and development opportunities are provided to assist Research Degree Coordinators and supervisors in the performance of their duties;

   b. ensuring Research Degree Coordinators provide research degree students with relevant information upon commencement of candidature, including:

      i. policy/guidelines governing ethics and integrity, compliance, intellectual property, authorship, research misconduct and copyright;

      ii. support, facilities and resources available to research degree students within the University; and

      iii. appeal, at risk and grievance procedures;

   c. negotiating supervisor workload at commencement of candidature such as to provide the research degree student with appropriate and adequate supervision throughout candidature, and renegotiating as required. Such workload is to be distributed between the Principal Supervisor, Co-Supervisor and associate supervisor(s) of the Supervisory Panel;

   d. ensuring each research degree student has resources available according to the minimum resources for students and providing project-specific funds for the student to conduct the research project in accordance with the approved research proposal (refer to Appendix AB-58 AD1);

   e. ensuring that supervision will be available in the area of the research degree student's research for the normal duration of candidature;

   f. in conjunction with the Research Degree Coordinator, and in consultation with the research degree student, appointing a substitute Principal Supervisor where a supervisor is absent for six (6) weeks or more; and

   g. ensuring that a local area work health and safety & injury management (WHS & IM) system that is aligned with the University's WHS & IM Plan is in place for each research degree student to follow.

D. Responsibilities of Research Degree Coordinators

9. The Research Degree Coordinator is responsible to the Dean of Research (or delegate) for the oversight of all matters related to the management and supervision of research degree students. The Research Degree Coordinator reports research degree activities to the Academic Unit's Dean of Research (or delegate).

10. The Research Degree Coordinator, in conjunction with the Dean of Research (or delegate), is responsible for:

    a. Administering research degrees in the Academic Unit as follows:

       i. coordinate transparent processes for the allocation of Supervisory Panel members (internal supervisors, external associates and/or advisors) according to Policy AB-64: Supervision of Research Degree Students and Academic Unit guidelines/procedures;

       ii. coordinate the submission of research proposals to the review panel and to the Academic Unit research committee;

       iii. coordinate and monitor planning and reporting of research degree student progress as per Procedure AB-58 P3: Research Degrees Student Progression;

      iv. monitor for issues and/or conflicts between research degree students and supervisors and initiate strategies to reduce the impact of these issues on student progress;

      v. act as mediator to facilitate the resolution of conflict between research degree students and supervisors;

      vi. in the event of unsatisfactory student progress, consult with the research degree student, supervisor(s), and Dean of Research (or delegate) to determine the most appropriate course of action, as per Procedure AB-58 P3: Research Degrees Student Progression;

      vii. in the event of suspected research misconduct by a research degree student, facilitate the inquiry process as per Procedure AB-58 P7: Research Degrees Student Research Misconduct;

      viii. authorise variations to candidature; and

      ix. monitor the selection of examiners and the outcomes of examinations and where required, assist supervisors to develop recommendations for the Research Degree Examination and Quality Panel.

  b. Helping to build a research rich education environment as follows:

      i. participate in the implementation of strategic initiatives of the University within their Academic Unit and the dissemination of information about such initiatives;

      ii. ensure research degree students are provided with relevant information upon commencement of candidature as follows:

          1. policies, procedures, and codes governing ethics and integrity, compliance, intellectual property, authorship, research misconduct and copyright;

          2. support, facilities and resources available to research degree students within the University; and

          3. appeal, at risk and grievance procedures;

      iii. in conjunction with supervisors, direct research degree students towards research education and training resources, including research and transferrable skills development activities (UniSA*EDGE)* and other relevant external and internal research education and training opportunities;

      iv. facilitate the development of appropriate seminar opportunities at the local level and encourage participation of research degree students and supervisors; and

      v. assist supervisors to gain access to relevant policies, procedures, guidelines and codes governing research education and research degree supervision, the area's procedures and information about the University's supervisor development program.

E. Responsibilities of research degree supervisors

11. Supervisory Panels are the preferred model of supervision for research degree students at UniSA. Principal Supervisors are responsible for establishing supervisory responsibilities and reporting processes for the Panel. Within a Supervisory Panel, responsibilities should be established and agreed to as soon as practicable in the development of the student's research proposal.

12. All supervisors are expected to supervise their research degree students in accordance with the responsibilities below, to foster research integrity and maximise the opportunities for timely and successful completions by:

   a. being familiar with, abiding by and guiding research degree students in relation to the University's policies, procedures, codes and guidelines relevant to research degrees, including intellectual property, ethics and compliance, integrity, authorship arrangements, copyright and research misconduct and Research Degree Graduate Qualities;

   b. remaining aware of current supervisory practices and the policy environment by participating in supervisor development and awareness programs provided by the University, as per Policy AB-64: Supervision of Research Degree Students;

   c. establishing with the commencing research degree student the mutual expectations and obligations outlined in the Research Induction Plan and Statement of Agreement, and reviewing these as necessary;

   d. providing the resources for research degree students to undertake their proposed research program in their Academic Unit;

   e. communicating/meeting regularly with research degree students in order to provide timely advice and guidance in all matters related to research conduct and overseeing all stages of the research process, including identifying the research objectives and approach, obtaining ethics and other approvals, conducting the research and reporting the research outcomes in appropriate fora and media;

   f. maintaining a level of communication with the research degree student, and other Panel members (including advisors) to ensure adequate supervision;

   g. satisfying themselves that the research methods and outcomes of research degree students under their supervision are appropriate and valid;

   h. ensuring that, prior to data collection, ethics and compliance approvals for the research program as necessary have been obtained, and that the research degree student adopts ethical and safe working practices in places of study and work and complies with work health and safety and injury management guidelines;

   i. during candidature supervisors are expected to:

      i. refer the research degree student to appropriate resources and assist with preparation of the research proposal;

      ii. monitor the research degree student's writing style to help avoid plagiarism and to ensure appropriate presentation of written material; and

      iii. comment critically and constructively, and in reasonable time, on the content of drafts of the thesis.

   j. providing academic support and guidance, and helping research degree students to create strategic academic networks by putting them in contact with relevant researchers and other students in their discipline;

   k. direct research degree students towards research education and training resources, including research and transferrable skills development activities (UniSA*EDGE)* and other relevant external and internal research education and training opportunities;

l. encourage research degree student participation in appropriate seminar opportunities at the local level;

m. completing the bi-annual progress review and reporting requirements of the University and advising the research degree student on preparation for and performance in these reviews and reports;

n. monitoring the research degree student's performance and ensuring the student is promptly made aware of inadequate progress or insufficient work by providing detailed feedback that identifies problems, establishing agreed timelines and milestones by which to measure performance, and conducting additional reviews of progress as required;

o. encouraging and supporting research degree students to publish and present their work where appropriate;

p. ensuring that research degree students receive appropriate recognition and credit for their research;

q. contributing to examination procedures by:

   i. certifying that the thesis is of a standard appropriate to the discipline, is properly presented and adequately expressed in English, conforms to University regulations and policies and is, therefore, prima facie, worthy of examination. The research degree student should be consulted on the choice of examiners but the final decision lies with the supervisor;

   ii. advising the research degree student on how to deal constructively and appropriately with critical review, including examiners' comments and recommendations;

   iii. recommending to the Dean of Research (or delegate) an appropriate response to the examiners' recommendations, including a proposed resolution of conflicting examiners' reports to the Research Degree Examinations and Quality Panel, where necessary; and

   iv. reviewing amendments to the thesis and when required certify that the requisite amendments have been made within the required timeframe.

r. encouraging and supporting research degree students' career aspirations and planning; and helping them to develop the personal and professional capabilities that will enhance their career options.

F. Responsibilities of advisors

13. Advisors are appointed to Supervisory Panels on a voluntary basis and their participation will vary depending upon the research project being undertaken. Advisors are responsible for providing industry and/or end-user expertise to a research degree student's research project. Depending on the student's research project, end-users can be drawn from a wide range of industries, including but not limited to private enterprise, federal, state or local government and the not for profit sector.

14. It is expected that advisors will be involved in the co-creation of student research projects; to actively mentor the research degree student and to provide them with end-user linked exposure and experience, as appropriate. Depending on the needs of the student and the specific research project being undertaken, advisors may:

    a. provide feedback on the research degree student's research proposal;

    b. maintain an appropriate level of communication with the research degree student and/or the Supervisory Panel and participate in regular meetings as necessary;

c. mentor the research degree student throughout candidature;

d. facilitate end-user linked experiences such as invitations to board meetings, placement opportunities or other exposure;

e. encourage and support the research degree student's career aspirations and help them to develop the personal and professional capabilities that will enhance their career options; and

f. review and provide feedback on drafts of the research degree student's thesis.

G. Responsibilities of research degree students

15. Conducting research:

a. in aspiration of becoming a professional researcher, research degree students are expected to: obtain ethics and safety approvals for the research program as necessary (prior to data collection), adopt ethical and safe working practices in all places of study and work and comply with work health and safety and injury management guidelines;

b. participate in the intellectual community provided by their Academic Unit and undertake appropriate research and transferrable skills development activities through UniSA*EDGE*;

c. play an informed part in planning a research project in order to complete the thesis and degree within the allocated time of scholarship and/or funded candidature;

d. maintain the progress of work according to milestones agreed with their supervisors;

e. participate in planning and reviewing progress, and monitoring achievement of Research Degree Graduate Qualities in partnership with their supervisors and the Research Degree Coordinator;

f. disseminate, present and publish their results on an ongoing basis during their candidacy;

g. cite the work of other authors fully and accurately when disseminating research findings;

h. comply with any confidentiality requirements of sponsors; and

i. take the initiative in raising problems or difficulties and share responsibility for seeking appropriate solutions.

16. Managing candidature:

a. at commencement of candidature, research degree students should establish with supervisors the mutual expectations and obligations outlined in the Research Induction Plan and Statement of Agreement, including supervision style and the development of Research Degree Graduate Qualities;

b. take an active part in maintaining an appropriate schedule of meetings with their Supervisory Panel;

c. undertake training in research ethics, work health and safety, environmental protection, as well as technical matters appropriate to their discipline;

d. have a completed and approved research proposal within a maximum period of three months (in Master of Research programs) or six (6) months (in PhD programs) post commencement in order to confirm their candidacy and continue their enrolment; and

e. submit the necessary documentation (including Review of Progress documents confirming satisfactory progress against agreed milestones) to enable Student and Academic Services to update their enrolment.

17. Examination:

   a. research degree students must prepare the thesis for examination and submit with the necessary documentation according to appropriate research degree policies, procedures and guidelines;

   b. participate in discussions relating to the appointment of examiners and, while not having a right to nominate or veto the choice, raise any concerns or objections about potential examiners;

   c. after examination, promptly make required corrections to the thesis within the allocated time and ensure enrolment is active in the case of major amendments; and

   d. for PhD students, participate in an oral defence of the thesis.

18. Research Integrity: All research degree students are required to comply with University policies and procedures and national codes as listed in clause 2.

19. Professionalism:

   a. abiding by the University research degree policies, procedures and codes of good practice and with other policies and procedures including UniSA's intellectual property, data storage and management, copyright, research misconduct and authorship policies;

   b. regularly checking to ensure biographical, demographic and email details are up-to-date in myUniSA, checking email on a regular basis, conforming with University administrative requirements such as payment of all fees by the due dates and complying with enrolment dates; and

   c. providing feedback to UniSA on the research degree student experience.