

Supervision: your rights and responsibilities

Please note: in February 2021 a new digital system, **Research Education Candidature System (RECS)** was launched to allow HDR candidates to manage many administrative tasks that were previously the responsibility of HDRAC or Sydney Student. Some of our information regarding these processes might be outdated. We are currently in the process of updating it.

If you have difficulties with RECS contact HDRAC for assistance.

From 1 July 2020 **all HDR students must have a supervisory team with a minimum of two supervisors.** All members on your supervisory team are expected to collectively advise you on your research activities. The specific roles and responsibilities of each member of your supervisory team will be communicated to you by your lead supervisor. All supervisors are expected to provide continuous supervision.

Your supervisory team's role is to collectively offer advice, assistance and direction to support you in completing your project. Your relationship with your supervisors can be complex, intense, and immensely rewarding. However, like all relationships, there are bound to be highs and lows, and it's important to be realistic in your expectations of your supervisors.

Your lead supervisor

When you applied to do your research project it was your lead supervisor who was responsible for assessing your capacity and research topic. Your lead supervisor is responsible for the overall supervisory experience, including ensuring you have adequate resources and support necessary to make progress.

At commencement of your candidature your lead supervisor has the key roles of directing you to participate in both mandatory and useful programs or workshops, as well as ensuring you are informed about:

- orientation events and University support services
- degree and administrative requirements

- all applicable laws, policies and procedures (including those applicable to research integrity, academic honesty, ethics approvals and intellectual property)

Your lead supervisor must consult with you on an agreed framework for milestones and goals to be completed with a timeline. They are also responsible for determining, before the end of your probationary period, whether you have core communication skills in both written and spoken English to a standard generally acceptable to the discipline. **Don't be too concerned if you are directed to relevant courses**, as timely improvements, especially in communication areas, will be beneficial to your progress.

All your supervisors have a role in ensuring you are making progress, but **your lead supervisor will be the one monitoring progress** within the context of the overall plan. They will also provide feedback on your progress to you, your faculty, and any scholarship authority. Importantly, your lead supervisor **must ensure that you have sufficient time to write up your thesis** and, if required, work with you to change the scope of the project to meet the time available.

Near to the time of submission your lead supervisor is responsible for guiding you towards meeting all necessary thesis and administrative requirements. They are also responsible for suggesting potential thesis examiners to the postgraduate coordinator.

How do I know if my supervisors are right for me?

Talk with other research candidates about their experience of supervision. You will learn that each experience is unique, and what works for another student may not work for you. However, a fundamental principle for a productive supervisory relationship is mutual respect.

For an understanding of what the University considers as a standard supervisory relationship, and to know more about your supervision rights, check out these policies and resources:

- The University [Higher Degree by Research Supervision Policy 2020](#)
- The University [Higher Degree by Research Supervision Procedures 2020](#) (available on the [Policy Register](#))
- The University [website on research supervision](#)
- [The Thesis Whisperer](#)

Establish what you need

This is likely to change during your candidature. Consider these questions:

- What level of direction or guidance do you need?
- What is each supervisor's role in your acquisition of skills?
- Do you expect your supervisors to be a mentor, critic, supporter, director, facilitator, provider or teacher?
- How do your supervisors see their roles?

The supervisory relationship is your relationship, so take charge of it from the outset. If you feel uncomfortable or unsure about any aspect of your supervisory relationships, speak with someone you trust or [contact us for advice](#). You have a right to change your supervisory arrangements.

Every student's needs are different and comparing your relationship with your supervisors to someone else's may not be useful. While there are guidelines, your unique supervision needs are based on many factors, such as workload, location, and the nature of your project. Some students only need to see their supervisors a few times a year and supplement that contact with email, video chat, or phone. Other students require more frequent face-to-face consultation. It is your responsibility to know what you need from your supervisors and the direction you want to take with your research. It is your supervisors' responsibility to respond in accordance with the supervision policy. **Where a change in research direction occurs, your supervisory arrangements may need to change** and this should be negotiated by you with your lead supervisor and the postgraduate coordinator as required.

Your safety

You have a right to a safe research environment at all times. Your supervisory team is responsible for ensuring safe working practices and informing you about work health and safety requirements, including appropriate training. The University expects students and supervisors to behave professionally and respectfully towards each other. [Harassment or discrimination](#) of any kind will not be tolerated – if you have such concerns please [contact us for advice](#). Any supervisory relationship that becomes romantic or sexual is not appropriate and must be reported to the postgraduate coordinator who is responsible for changing your supervisory arrangements.

Good communication

The most important part of your relationship with your supervisors is good communication. Establishing and nurturing good communication from the start is essential to ensuring you receive the support you need, especially at times when things – your research or life generally – are not going so well. Your research may dominate your life, while your supervisors may have many students to supervise in addition to teaching and research responsibilities. As a result, **it is important to clarify expectations of all parties about aspects of your candidature early on**. Negotiate where you differ, and review the effectiveness of the arrangement periodically, such as at the beginning of each research period, or just before each [progress review](#).

At the beginning of your candidature, **discuss with each supervisor the process for resolving problems if they arise**. It is important that you are given the opportunity to address any of your supervisors' concerns before a progress review.

We recommend you **keep notes on all supervision meetings, especially where research feedback is discussed**, and promptly email them to your supervisors, as a record of the meeting and to ensure everyone agrees on what was communicated in the meeting.

Intellectual property

At commencement (or when appropriate) you should clarify your expectations regarding authorship and you and your supervisors should agree in writing about authorship of publications and acknowledgement of contributions during and after candidature. Prior to publication, it's a good idea to check on the validity of the agreement with each supervisor. The University does not assert any claim over intellectual property (IP) created by a student, unless prescribed otherwise by law, or you agree otherwise. **The University cannot force a student to assign their IP rights to the University as a condition of enrolment**. Some students agree to assign their IP rights in order to be involved in a project, but this must be your choice. If you have concerns about your authorship or intellectual property rights please [contact our Legal Service](#) for advice.

Related articles:

- [Intellectual property for HDR students](#)

Feedback on writing

You have the right to feedback that is timely and constructive. Written work up to the equivalent in length of a chapter must be returned to you with written feedback within one month. A full draft of a thesis must be returned within three months, unless otherwise negotiated. **Identify with your lead supervisor how progress will be monitored** (written work, seminars, progress reviews etc.). At commencement you are responsible for having a progress plan in place, in consultation with your supervisors. It should include future personal development. If your progress is unsatisfactory at any time you must be advised in writing by your supervisors.

Related articles:

- [Progress reviews](#)

Resources

Research students are entitled to have adequate facilities and other resources available in your department. Such facilities normally include all-hours access to appropriate workspace, lab space and equipment, and appropriate access to technology. At commencement support resources should be discussed with your supervisors. **It is your supervisors' responsibility to ensure that facilities identified as necessary to your candidature are available to you.** Each faculty and school varies in the level and type of resource support they offer, but if you need something, you have a right to ask your supervisors for assistance at any stage of candidature. Note that **exclusive access to a desk or computer are not available in all cases.**

Absences and leave

If any of your supervisors is away for a month or more, they should inform the postgraduate coordinator to make suitable arrangements to ensure that you have ongoing supervision. This may mean remote supervision (e.g. via Skype or Zoom), or increased direct supervision by another member of the supervisory team while they are away. Where the absence is foreseeable, the supervisor must notify the postgraduate coordinator, you, and your other supervisors at least one month before their date of departure. If a supervisor is intending to retire or resign, you should be consulted as soon as is practical. You have a right to be actively involved in the planning arrangements regarding ongoing supervision.

If you require some time away from your research project it is your responsibility to let your supervisors know. Remember, you are entitled to annual leave of up to four (4) weeks per year, so plan to have breaks and give advance notice to your supervisors. For more information on annual leave, and other types of leave available to you as a research student, read our related article: [Leave from HDR studies and extension of candidature](#).

Know your faculty (your supervisors don't know everything)

There are many things your supervisors can't do for you. At commencement of candidature you should attend faculty and department inductions and spend some time familiarising yourself with your faculty's structure, culture and 'personality'. If your research is interdisciplinary you should get to know each faculty as it is likely that they are quite different to one another. It will save you time and effort later on if you know how to work with the relevant faculty offices and how to access workshops, conferences, seminars and networking information, scholarships, funding and employment information, and support or social opportunities.

Voice your career aspirations

Let your supervisors know your career aspirations - it may help them facilitate opportunities for you. If you're hoping for an academic or research career, publishing papers will be a priority. However, if you're considering managerial, business or government roles, it may be more important for you to network with relevant groups. Research students are expected to take advantage of opportunities to meet other academics and researchers in the field, and your supervisors have a role in facilitating and supporting such opportunities.

Research budget, ethics approval, and progress review

Your supervisors are expected to provide you with assistance in developing important applications, research plans and reports on progress. One member of your supervisory team must be nominated as chief investigator on your ethics application and is responsible for submission of the application.

When problems arise

To prevent the escalation of problems, **take the initiative to raise any issues – no matter how trivial they seem – early on with your supervisors.** Many HDR students will encounter some problems with their supervisory arrangements at some point during their candidature. Act quickly to sort them out, first by yourself, and if you require assistance, with your faculty postgraduate coordinator. Your progress reviews aim to uncover difficulties in your candidature, and supervisory problems are often addressed at this time.

Some supervisory relationships may become abusive or bullying in nature – this is never acceptable. **You deserve to be treated with respect**, and have the right to raise a complaint against a supervisor to the faculty or the University. If you experience problems with your supervisor that cannot be addressed within your faculty, [contact us](#) for support.

Appointing additional supervisors

The postgraduate coordinator may review and change your supervisory arrangements as required throughout your candidature. Where you or a supervisor identify a gap in your supervision, a request for an additional supervisor can be directed to the postgraduate coordinator. An additional supervisor must meet eligibility requirements and can be external to the faculty of the student or lead supervisor (including an appropriate member of the community or industry).

Changing supervisors

You have the right to change your supervision arrangements. Many students think about changing their topic or supervisors. Sometimes changes are justified. It is important to carefully consider such decisions and the consequences:

- How will a change affect your wellbeing, scholarship, project, publications etc?
- Can the problem be resolved without changing a supervisor?

For some candidates, it becomes obvious that their supervisory arrangements cannot give them the guidance that is required. Sometimes supervisory relationships are either not productive, or have broken down. If changing

your supervisory arrangements is not an option, you might be able to move to another faculty or institution – but should be considered a last resort. [Seek advice from us](#) before making any final decisions.

Take care of your supervisory relationship

If you want to have a productive and respectful relationship with your supervisors, you need to take equal responsibility in nurturing that relationship. Changing supervisors can be stressful, awkward, or simply not an option. If one of your supervisors chooses to end the supervisory relationship, be aware that the faculty may not be able to appoint a replacement. In such a situation, the expectation will be for you to find a new supervisor. If your research topic or area is narrow, this may be difficult.

Research Supervisor Connect

The University maintains a website called [Research Supervisor Connect](#) which is a register of all individuals approved as research supervisors for HDR students.