

Supervision

All HDR students must have a supervisory team with a minimum of 2 supervisors. The role of your supervisory team is to provide academic support and guidance across your candidature, and 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.

Finding a supervisor

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

Supervisory roles

At the commencement of your candidature your lead supervisor has the key role of directing you to participate in both mandatory and optional 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, including a timeline. They are also responsible for determining, before the end of your probationary period, whether you have the 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 your progress 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 your thesis and, if required, work with you to change the scope of the project to meet the time available.

When you are close to submitting, 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.

Your supervisory relationships

Your relationships 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.

All supervisory relationships are unique. **The most fundamental principle for a productive supervisory relationship is mutual respect.** It's always good to establish professional and supportive working boundaries right away.

Consider these questions to help you understand what you need from your supervisory relationships:

- 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 mentors, critics, supporters, directors, facilitators, providers, or teachers?
- How do your supervisors see their roles?

Supervisory relationships are your relationships, so take charge of them 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 you should negotiate this with your lead supervisor and the postgraduate coordinator as required.

For an understanding of what the University considers to be a standard supervisory relationship, and to learn 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](#).

How to establish good communication with your supervisors

Establishing good communication from the start is essential to ensuring you receive the support you need from your supervisors. Your research may dominate your life, whereas your supervisors may have many students to supervise, in addition to teaching and research responsibilities. As a result, it is important to clarify all parties' expectations 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.

When problems arise

To prevent problems escalating, 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 their 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 not productive or have deteriorated. If changing your supervisory arrangements is not an option, you might be able to move to another faculty or institution as a last resort. [Seek advice from us](#) before making any final decisions.

If you want to have productive and respectful relationships with your supervisors, you need to take equal responsibility in nurturing those relationships. 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, you will be expected to find a new supervisor. If your research topic or area is narrow, this may be difficult.

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.

Intellectual property

You should clarify your expectations regarding authorship early into your candidature. 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 if 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 and so on). 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, your supervisors must advise you in writing.

Related articles:

- [Progress reviews](#)

Accessing facilities and resources

Research students are entitled to have adequate facilities and other resources available in their department. Such facilities normally include all-hours access to an appropriate workspace, lab space and equipment, and appropriate access to technology. Support resources should be discussed with your supervisors at commencement. 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 is not always available.

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 submitting the application.

Absences and leave

If any of your supervisors is away for a month or more, they should tell the postgraduate coordinator to make suitable arrangements so that you have ongoing supervision. This may mean remote supervision (e.g. via Zoom), or increased direct supervision by another member of the supervisory team. 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 planning arrangements for ongoing supervision.

If you require 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 and culture. 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.

Your safety and wellbeing

You always have a right to a safe and supportive research environment. 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.

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