



UNSW Policy	
Responsible Officer	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)
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Modifications	
Superseded Documents	<i>UNSW Guidelines for the Supervision of Postgraduate Research</i> approved by Academic Board in June 1999 (AB99/43)
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Associated Documents	Code of Conduct for the Responsible Practice of Research Guidelines for Postgraduate Research UNSW Delegations of Authority

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The University recognizes the integral role of supervisors to the delivery of high quality research training for research students and the importance of supervision to the overall experience of research students. A review of higher degree research candidatures in the past 12 months has highlighted the need for consistent terminology used for supervisors across the University, and the need for eligibility criteria for appointment of supervisors to be defined, and a statement of the roles and responsibilities expected by the University of such appointees.

The present policy has been developed taking into account best practice and policy within Go8 Australian Universities and in consultation with key stakeholders in the University.

## 2. DEFINITIONS

All research students, upon admission to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy or a Masters by Research will have at least a supervisor and either a co-supervisor or joint supervisor appointed.

### 2.1 Supervisor

The supervisor is the member of the academic or senior research staff appointed to take primary responsibility for the candidature. The supervisor has a high level of expertise in the proposed field of study, must be available at all stages of the candidature to provide advice and assistance and guide the direction of the research and is responsible for reporting on the progress of the candidature to the Head of School and the Faculty Higher Degree Committee. The supervisor is the administrative contact for all academic aspects of the candidature by the Graduate Research School. The supervisor is normally located in the School in which the candidate is enrolled.

## 2.2 Co-supervisor

Each higher degree research candidate must have a co-supervisor (unless the candidate has a joint supervisor). The co-supervisor may have specific expertise that is useful to the candidate's research programme and should be available as an independent person from whom the candidate may seek advice during the course of the candidature, and in particular when the supervisor is absent from the University. The minimum expectation is that the supervisor, co-supervisor and candidate will meet at least once a semester.

## 2.3 Joint Supervisor

A candidate may be appointed two joint supervisors who take equal responsibility for the research programme and direction. Appointment of two joint supervisors is appropriate for cross-Faculty enrolments, or cross-School enrolments, when there is a formal equal collaboration between the two joint supervisors and sharing of resources to support the candidature.

## 2.4 Panel Supervision

A supervisory panel may be appointed that includes a member of industry, or an external person, in addition to a supervisor and co-supervisor. Appointment of formal supervisory panels is appropriate in cases where there is an agreement between the University and external organisations such as NICTA regarding research.

# 3. ELIGIBILITY

## 3.1 Supervisor

A person is eligible to be appointed as a supervisor provided that (a) the person is able to fulfil the roles and responsibilities outlined in Section 4, and (b) the person's academic tenure exceeds the expected duration of the candidature, and (c) the person holds a Doctorate. The following people may be appointed as a supervisor:

- i. A full-time or fractional full-time member of the academic staff of the University who has appropriate research experience and a continuing active participation in research and is a member of the School in which the candidate is enrolled
- ii. A person who holds a current appointment as an academic associate of a School of the University (e.g, Emeritus Professor, staff on a pre-retirement contract, Visiting Fellow), provided that the person is undertaking research responsibilities expected of a member of the University's academic staff at the level required to support a higher degree research candidate; such appointments must be approved by the Faculty Higher Degree Committee.

A holder of a research fellowship whose tenure cannot be guaranteed to exceed the period of the candidature, may be appointed as supervisor **only if**

- i. The co-supervisor holds a position whose tenure exceeds the duration of the candidature, and
- ii. The person has appropriate research expertise, and
- iii. The co-supervisor has agreed to act as supervisor should the fellow's position terminate before the candidate has completed.

Conjoint or adjunct appointments are eligible to be appointed as the supervisors of students whose research will be carried out in a clinical School or an approved UNSW affiliated Centre, Institute or location as defined at <http://www.ro.unsw.edu.au/centres/>, provided that

- i. There is evidence of their experience as supervisors of research students, and

- ii. The Faculty Higher Degree Committee is satisfied that there are mechanisms in place in the Centre or Institute to ensure that appropriate expertise and supervision is available for the duration of the candidature.

Supervision of more than 5.0 students full-time at any one time requires

- i. Evidence of adequate time for supervision taking into account teaching, research and administrative responsibilities, and
- ii. A track record of successful completions within 4 years (PhD) or 2 years (Masters), and
- iii. Approval by the Head of School; supervisory loads will be monitored by the Faculty Associate Dean (Research/Research Training).

A person is **not eligible** to be appointed as supervisor if the person

- i. Is a candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, or
- ii. Holds a visiting or other appointment that is not at the level to provide the sustained commitment required to support a PhD candidature.

Where the supervisor has not had previous experience in successful supervision of doctoral candidates to completion

- i. The co-supervisor should normally be an experienced supervisor (i.e. have successfully supervised 2 PhD students to completion), or two joint supervisors should be appointed, and
- ii. Professional development and attendance at University supervision training programmes or other relevant activities should be undertaken as specified by the Head of School.

In exceptional circumstances, the Faculty Higher Degree Committee may approve the appointment of a person who does not qualify to be appointed as a supervisor according to the criteria above, or approve alternate supervisory arrangements, provided that compelling reasons are presented in writing from the Head of School and the appointment is endorsed by the Associate Dean (Research/Research Training). The Dean of Graduate Research must be notified of such approvals.

### **3.2 Co-supervisor**

A person is eligible to be appointed as a co-supervisor if the person

- i. Holds an appointment that satisfies the eligibility conditions for the appointment as supervisor, or
- ii. Holds an honorary position, or is retired and remains active in research, or
- iii. Has appropriate expertise and experience as determined by the Faculty Higher Degree Committee

Appointment of a co-supervisor who has no formal affiliation with the University is appropriate in certain cases. Such an appointment would be appropriate to provide expertise for a research project, or when it is planned that a student spend time in an external laboratory or studio as part of a collaboration and includes researchers from authorised institutions such as government departments, research institutions, libraries, museums or industry.

### **3.3 Joint Supervisor**

In the case of appointment of joint supervisors, at least one of the joint supervisors should satisfy the conditions for appointment as a supervisor.

## **4 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **4.1 Supervisor**

The role of the supervisor is to be the University's agent in advising and assisting the candidate to complete an original and feasible research program. The supervisor carries the principal responsibility in overseeing the candidate's progress, coordinating meetings and putting in place mechanisms to allow regular contact and communication between the supervisors and the candidate.

The specific responsibilities of the supervisor include:

- i. Ensuring the candidate fully understands relevant UNSW research policy with specific attention to:
  - (a) Authorship of research published during candidature including author order and the mechanism for establishing the right to be listed as an author in the discipline
  - (b) Intellectual Property: any restrictions on publication rights due to confidentiality or other intellectual property protection requirements need to be clearly outlined at the outset and reviewed as appropriate during the candidature, particularly restrictions arising from the registrations of patents.
  - (c) Ethics
  - (d) Occupational Health and Safety
  - (e) Retention and storage of data produced by the candidate
  - (f) Conflict of interest: the supervisor must declare any relevant conflicts with respect to any interest in a company that is contracted to do research with UNSW, or personal conflicts with respect to the student, co-supervisors, Postgraduate Coordinators or staff who are directly involved in making recommendations on candidature.
- ii. Ensuring regular contact and communication are maintained with the candidate via a mutually agreed, documented mechanism (e.g. regular meeting schedule, monthly reports) that is reviewed annually by the candidate and supervisor.
- iii. Providing formal advice on progress of the candidature to the Head of School via the UNSW annual review
- iv. Ensuring that the candidate is provided with appropriate resources and support for the research programme
- v. Ensuring that absences from the University of more than 4 weeks are covered by a member of academic staff if the co-supervisor is not available or not a member of academic staff; this includes periods of approved leave eg., sabbatical leave or time overseas
- vi. Certifying that the thesis is in the correct format for examination, and provide advice to the Head of School on the appointment of examiners.

### **4.2 Joint Supervisor**

Joint supervisors take equal responsibility for the candidature. One of the joint supervisors must be designated as the administrative contact for the Graduate Research School. The location of this supervisor will dictate the School and Faculty through which the academic decisions are made on candidature via the relevant Faculty Higher Degree Committee.

### **4.3 Co-Supervisor**

The role of the co-supervisor is dependent on the nature of the appointment, their professional status, and location. The minimum expectation is that the co-supervisor will:

- i. Meet at least once a semester with the supervisor and candidate, or have in place communication channels if meeting in person is not possible; and
- ii. Act in place of the supervisor when the supervisor is absent from the University, and

- iii. Provide feedback to the candidate at annual review,

## **5. APPOINTMENT PROCEDURES**

All research students, upon admission to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy or a Masters by Research will have at least a supervisor and either a co-supervisor or joint supervisor appointed.

### **5.1 Delegations**

The Head of School or Postgraduate Coordinator in the School or the Associate Dean (Research or Research Training) recommends the appointment of a supervisor, co-supervisor or joint supervisor. The Head of School in recommending the appointment of a supervisor/co-supervisor, joint supervisors, or a supervisory panel must certify that there is appropriate space, resources and expertise available to support the proposed research programme.

### **5.2 Appointment of a New Supervisor During Candidature**

Appointment of a supervisor is on the expectation that the supervisor is available for the duration of the candidature. While change of supervisors during the course of the candidature is not desirable and occurs rarely, there are several instances when appointment of a new supervisor may be required. If there is a breakdown in the supervisory relationship, to the extent that appointment of a new supervisor is required, via a documented process in the School that outlines the issues that have arisen, the Associate Dean Research in the Faculty must be advised. Mediation, the suitability of the co-supervisor to be appointed as supervisor, and other proposed supervisors in the School/Faculty need to be discussed with the candidate. Changes to supervisory arrangements as a result of these discussions are subject to the approval of the Faculty of Higher Degree Committee.

### **5.3 Departure of a Supervisor**

If the supervisor should leave UNSW, then normally the co-supervisor would be appointed as supervisor. Such candidatures will be assessed on a case-by-case basis to ensure that the candidate is not disadvantaged. Factors that need to be considered include the stage of candidature, whether there is a supervisor available at UNSW with appropriate expertise available to support the candidate to a successful thesis completion, and whether the supervisor is able and willing to continue in a supervisory role in their new position. Special arrangements, outside the conditions specified for new admissions to candidature, may be considered by the Higher Degree Committee and approved by the relevant Faculty Dean and the Dean of Graduate Research.