

Guideline Title: Higher Degree by Research (HDR) Supervision

Guideline Owner: Dean, Graduate Research

This guideline supports the University to operationalise the *Research Training Policy* and must be complied with.

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1. INTENT

This guideline outlines processes, requirements, conduct, roles and responsibilities to ensure that HDR supervision is conducted in the most beneficial, efficient, and effective manner, and aligns with principles outlined in the [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](#), the [Higher Education Standards Framework \(Threshold Standards\) 2021](#) and the [Australian Council of Graduate Research Guidelines for Quality Graduate Research Supervision](#).

2. ORGANISATIONAL SCOPE

This guideline applies to all Staff, Candidates and Supervisors involved in any aspect of Higher Degrees by Research (HDR) including adjunct positions and emeritus professors that administer, supervise, or otherwise contribute to HDR Candidates and HDR Courses.

3. DEFINITIONS

The [University Glossary](#) and definitions in the [Research Training Policy](#) apply to this guideline.

4. GUIDELINE CONTENT

Principles

- 4.1. ECU is committed to providing the highest standard and quality of research supervision, mentorship, and guidance to Candidates. The University will provide appropriate guidance on all aspects of a Candidate's research, including research design, conduct, completion,

publication, and communication. The University's commitment to research training supervision is underpinned by the following principles:

- a. integrity in all research and research training practices;
- b. commitment to aligning Candidates with areas of research expertise;
- c. Candidates are supported by appropriately trained and experienced individuals with capacity and expertise to provide appropriate supervision;
- d. ensuring respectful, collegiate, and constructive relationships between Candidates, Supervisors and others; and
- e. continuous and effective professional development of Supervisors and Candidates.

Supervision Panels

- 4.2. Each Candidate will receive supervision from an appropriately qualified Supervision Panel that the University will appoint upon the Candidate's enrolment. The Supervision Panel will comprise of a minimum of two University Staff, with contracts commensurate with the expected duration of enrolment, one of which must be Category C (defined below). Examples of possible Supervision Panels are illustrated in [Appendix 1](#).
- 4.3. Schools and Teaching Areas are responsible for ensuring that Candidates are supported by an appropriately qualified and trained supervision panel with sufficient time allocated to allow for effective supervision.
- 4.4. Staff supervising more than 5 Equivalent Full-Time Student Load (EFTSL) or 12 individual Candidates must seek the approval, in writing, from their relevant line manager, the relevant School Executive Dean and the Dean, Graduate Research, or their nominees, for each additional research Candidate. When approving additional supervisory load, the following should be considered.
 - a. HDR supervision experience, including past completion and attrition rates;
 - b. administrative, teaching and other research commitments; and
 - c. proposed role and load on the Supervision Panel.
- 4.5. The Supervision Panel will provide expertise, knowledge and support in the planning and conduct of the research. All Supervisors on a Supervision Panel have responsibility for:
 - a. supporting the Candidate in developing a project of appropriate scope and quality for the level of award;
 - b. maintaining regular contact with and providing timely feedback to the Candidate;
 - c. establishing, reviewing, and reconfirming project aims and milestones;
 - d. establishing and reviewing the role of Supervision Panel members;
 - e. facilitating the development of research and professional skills aligned to the Candidate's research topic and/or course and career goals;
 - f. ensuring that the Candidate's research is in line with legislative and policy requirements, such as the [Australian Code for the Conduct of Responsible Research](#), and the University's policies on [Conducting Research with Integrity](#) and [Intellectual Property](#);

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- g. mentoring the Candidate in areas including attainment of Course Learning Outcomes; appropriate professional skills; applications for funding; networking opportunities with colleagues in academia and beyond; presenting at conferences; casual work; assistance with publications; and career plan development; and
 - h. ensuring they have appropriate workload capacity and approval to supervise before agreeing to supervise a Candidate.
- 4.6. Supervisors must ensure that Candidates have advanced notice regarding any planned long service leave or ceasing of employment (e.g., retirement). Suitable alternative supervisory arrangements should be negotiated with the relevant Associate Dean of Research and line manager and communicated to the Candidate. Associate or Co-Principal Supervisors should ensure continuity of supervision during leave of the Principal Supervisor.
- 4.7. The Candidate and Supervisors must declare any perceived or possible conflict of interest with the Candidate, other Supervisors, and, where relevant, any partnering institution. Staff must not supervise or be involved in any assessment of a Candidate who is a member of their family, or with whom they have, or have had, a close personal relationship. It is not permitted for Supervisors who are in a close personal relationship to be on the same Supervision Panel, unless there is a compelling case for that approval, and a suitable third Supervisor is appointed to the panel. The Australian Council of Graduate Research provides [Good Practice Guidelines](#) that assist in identifying some, but not all, potential conflicts of interest. Further information can also be found in the [ECU Conflict of Interest](#) policy.
- 4.8. Applications to amend or vary a Supervision Panel must be completed on the relevant [University Prescribed form](#). Candidates should discuss any intentions to change their Supervision Panel with their currently appointed supervisors.
- 4.9. Supervisors have a responsibility to ensure Candidates receive ongoing and appropriate supervision. Any request from a Supervisor to change a Supervision Panel must, unless it is unreasonable in the circumstances to do so, be discussed with the Candidate and other panel members. If Supervisors and the Candidate are unable to address any concerns regarding supervision, they are encouraged to raise the matter with the relevant Associate Dean (Research) or Executive Dean.
- 4.10. If a Candidate is experiencing difficulties or has concerns with supervision, the Candidate must, unless it is unreasonable in the circumstances to do so, attempt to resolve the problem through discussion with their Supervisor(s). Should the Candidate be reluctant or unable to discuss concerns regarding their supervision with their Supervisor(s), they are encouraged to raise the matter with the relevant Associate Dean (Research) or Executive Dean.
- 4.11. Any Candidate who is dissatisfied with their supervision and discussions with their Supervisor(s) have failed to resolve the situation, are encouraged to meet with the relevant Associate Dean (Research).
- 4.12. Subject to paragraph 4.10 and 4.11 if a Candidate wishes to change their Supervisor(s), the Candidate must make the request in writing to the relevant Associate Dean (Research), outlining the reasons for the request.

- 4.13. Where a request for change of Supervisor(s) is not approved, the Candidate may apply for a review of this decision by submitting the original request, the response from the relevant Associate Dean (Research) and any further submission(s) to the relevant Executive Dean for final determination.
- 4.14. In cases where the Supervisor is an Associate Dean (Research) the matter should be escalated to the Executive Dean. Where the Executive Dean is a Supervisor the matter may be raised with the Dean, Graduate Research.
- 4.15. A request for change of Supervisor(s) may be made at any stage prior to the submission of the thesis for examination.
- 4.16. Following submission of their thesis for examination, a Candidate may not appeal against aspects of supervision that occurred prior to thesis submission.

Supervisor Roles

- 4.17. Candidates may be supported by Supervisors across a range of roles including:
- Principal
 - Co-Principal
 - Associate
 - Assistant
 - External Industry
 - External Academic

Principal and Co-Principal Supervisors

- 4.18. Principal and Co-Principal Supervisors must be registered in Category C. In addition to the above (e.g., paragraph 4.5), Principal and Co-Principal Supervisors have responsibility for:
- a. guiding the Candidate through course requirements including achieving required milestones, supporting timely completion, reporting on progress and nominating examiners;
 - b. providing clear communication with the Supervision Panel on required course and administrative requirements;
 - c. monitoring the progress of Candidates, and where necessary, advising Candidates when progress is unsatisfactory and documenting strategies for improvement;
 - d. maintaining knowledge of University procedures in order to advise Candidates on course and Milestone requirements such as mid-candidature, regular reporting, candidature management, and examination; and
 - e. mentoring other members of the supervisory panel as required.

Associate Supervisors

- 4.19. Associate Supervisors must be registered in Category B or C (described below) and support the Principal Supervisor to provide academic input or guidance and mentoring for the progress and development of the Candidate. With Associate Dean (Research) and Line

Manager approval, the Associate Supervisor may assume the role of Principal Supervisor when the Principal Supervisor is unavailable or absent.

Assistant Supervisors

- 4.20. Assistant Supervisors must be registered in Category A, B or C (described below) and will typically provide consultative rather than managerial responsibilities within the Supervision Panel.

External Supervisors

- 4.21. The appointment of External Supervisors to a Supervision Panel must be approved by the Principal Supervisor and relevant Executive Dean, certifying that they are satisfied the Supervisor can provide appropriate supervision and meet their responsibilities outlined in this guideline and other relevant policies. Arrangements for external supervision must be confirmed in writing, including the period of supervision, the contact model, and maximum and minimum limits on payment.
- 4.22. Schools are responsible for ensuring that any External Supervisors are notified of and provided access to all relevant University policies and procedures.
- 4.23. External Supervisors may be offered an honorary appointment (Adjunct, Honorary or Emeritus Staff) with the University, where there exists mutual benefit for the University and the External Supervisor.
- 4.24. External Supervisors must be registered on the University's HDR Supervisor Register, meet the requirements for their category of registration and be actively engaged in the HDR supervision.
- 4.25. External Supervisors are categorised as either External Industry or External Academic Supervisors and may be appointed with or without remuneration for their supervisory contribution. If remuneration is to occur, it must be negotiated between the Executive Dean of School and the External Supervisor, with reference to:
- a. relevant policies and procedures including the University's Remuneration and Reward policy;
 - b. the roles and responsibilities of the External Supervisor in relation to the candidature; and
 - a. the proportion of overall supervision being undertaken.

External Industry Supervisors

- 4.26. External Industry Supervisors are required to be from a [Research end-user](#) organisation.

External Academic Supervisors

- 4.27. External Academic Supervisors will typically be employed at a Higher Education Provider but may include supervision from any individuals not within a [Research end-user](#) organisation.

Supervisor Registration

- 4.28. All Supervisors must be registered on the University's HDR Supervisor Register maintained by Graduate Research Services. Staff that wish to be considered for inclusion in the HDR Supervisor Register or for a review of their supervision category should complete the relevant [Prescribed Process](#). Registration will be for a period of four years after which Supervisors will be required to renew their registration. Applications for registration and renewal of registration will be reviewed and approved by the Dean, Graduate Research (or nominee). Upon approval of registration, individuals will be appointed at a category commensurate with their experience, outlined below. Staff that no longer meet the eligibility requirements of a particular supervision category (outlined below) will be changed to an appropriate supervision category or deregistered, upon approval of the Deputy Vice Chancellor Research (or nominee). Staff may also be deregistered, upon approval of the Deputy Vice Chancellor Research (or nominee), if they have been disciplined for misconduct or failed to fulfill their duties as a Supervisor as outlined within ECU policies and procedures, the [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](#), the [Higher Education Standards Framework \(Threshold Standards\) 2021](#) and the [Australian Council of Graduate Research Good Practice Guidelines for Quality Graduate Research Supervision](#).

Category A Supervisor – Practitioner, External Academic or External Industry Supervisors

- 4.29. Category A Registration includes ECU Staff (Assistant Supervisor) or External (Industry and Academic Supervisors) Supervisors who provide specific skills or expertise to the Supervision Panel. Individuals with Category A Registration may only supervise in Supervision Panels involving two or more additional Supervisors, one of which is in Category C. To be eligible for Category A Supervisor individuals must:
- have appropriate skills and expertise to support the progression of the research project and development of the Candidate; and
 - be approved by the relevant Associate Dean (Research) to supervise on the relevant Supervision Panel.
- 4.30. Individuals that obtain Category A Registration may serve as an:
- Assistant Supervisor; or
 - External Industry Supervisor; or
 - External Academic Supervisor.

Category B Supervisor – Emerging and Developing Supervisors

- 4.31. Category B Registration may include ECU Staff Supervisors. Individuals with Category B Registration may only supervise in Supervision Panels involving at least one other Supervisor at Category C. To be eligible for Category B Supervisor individuals must:

- a. meet the requirements of Category A;
- b. have a recognised tertiary qualification equal to or above the course being supervised (or relevant professional experience as assessed by the relevant Associate Dean (Research) – see [Appendix 3](#));
- c. be research active, as evidenced by more than one relevant research publication/output in the past three years;
- d. have completed the University's HDR Supervision Induction and ECU's [Research Integrity Training](#); and
- e. have completed a HDR professional development activity, in the last 3 years.

4.32. Individuals that obtain Category B Registration may serve as an:

- Assistant Supervisor; or
- Associate Supervisor

Category C Supervisor – Experienced Supervisors

4.33. Category C Registration only applies to an ECU Academic Staff member. Individuals with Category C Registration may be part of a Supervision Panel involving at least one other Supervisor at Category B or C. To be eligible for Category C Supervisor, individuals must:

- a. meet the requirements of Category B;
- b. have completed the ECU WHS for Leaders training;
- c. have successfully supervised at least one HDR Candidate to completion or the Principal Supervisor Accreditation Program (see [Appendix 2](#)); and
- d. have completed a further two HDR professional development activities, in addition to the requirements for Category B, in the last 3 years.

4.34. Individuals that obtain Category C Registration may serve as an:

- Assistant Supervisor; or
- Associate Supervisor; or
- Co-Principal; or
- Principal Supervisor.

Examples of Supervision Panel Selection

4.35. [Appendix 1](#) provides several examples of possible Supervision Panels. The list below is not an exhaustive list of Supervision Panels and is intended to guide decisions on possible panel members. Appropriate and effective supervision is a responsibility of all Supervisors.

[Appendix 1](#) provides examples of where primary but not sole responsibilities may sit.

5. ACCOUNTABILITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Guideline Owner is the *Dean, Graduate Research* and has overall responsibility for the content of these guidelines and their operation.

The *Manager, Graduate Research Services* is responsible for currency of information and provision of advice relating to these guidelines.

6. RELATED DOCUMENTS

Legislation

[*Higher Education Standards Framework \(Threshold Standards\) 2021*](#)

Policies

[Conducting Research with Integrity](#)

[Conflict of Interest](#)

[Intellectual Property](#)

[Research Training](#)

Operational documents and resources

[Appendix 1: Examples of Supervision Panel Selection](#)

[Appendix 2: Principal Supervisor Accreditation Program](#)

[Appendix 3: Equivalent Experience for Academic Qualifications in HDR Supervision](#)

[Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](#)

[Australian Council of Graduate Research Guidelines for Quality Graduate Research Supervision](#)

[HDR Forms, Policies and Guidelines](#)

[Guideline: HDR Supervision](#)

[Research end-user](#)

[Research Integrity Training](#)

[Nomination of Supervisor form](#)

7. CONTACT INFORMATION

For queries relating to this document please contact:

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8. APPROVAL HISTORY

Guideline approved by:	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)
Date guideline first approved:	9 May 2024

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Date last modified:	29 August 2025
Revision history:	29 August 2025: The guideline was updated to refine Supervisor Registration requirements and standardised terminology to ensure consistency.
Next revision due:	July 2028
HPCM file reference:	

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Appendix 1: Examples of Supervision Panel Selection

Below provides several examples of possible Supervision Panels. The list below is not an exhaustive list of Supervision Panels and is intended to guide decisions on possible panel members. Appropriate and effective supervision is a responsibility of all supervisors and thus below provides examples of where primary but not sole responsibilities may sit.

Example 1

Role	Name	Supervisor Category	Load	Discipline Knowledge	Research Design	Research Governance	Mentoring Candidate	Mentoring Supervisors
Principal	Dr Z	C	70	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Associate	Dr X	B	30	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Example 2

Role	Name	Supervisor Category	Load	Discipline Knowledge	Research Design	Research Governance	Mentoring Candidate	Mentoring Supervisors
Principal	Dr Z	C	30	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Associate	Dr X	B	70	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Example 3

Role	Name	Supervisor Category	Load	Discipline Knowledge	Research Design	Research Governance	Mentoring Candidate	Mentoring Supervisors
Principal	Dr Z	C	60	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Co-Principal	Dr Y	C	40	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Example 4

Role	Name	Supervisor Category	Load	Discipline Knowledge	Research Design	Research Governance	Mentoring Candidate	Mentoring Supervisors
Principal	Dr Z	C	40		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Associate	Dr Y	B	40	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Associate	Dr X	B	20		<input type="checkbox"/>			

Example 5

Role	Name	Supervisor Category	Load	Discipline Knowledge	Research Design	Research Governance	Mentoring Candidate	Mentoring Supervisors
Principal	Dr Z	C	40	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Associate	Dr Y	B	40		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	
External Industry	Ms W	A	20	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			

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Example 6

<i>Role</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Supervisor Category</i>	<i>Load</i>	<i>Discipline Knowledge</i>	<i>Research Design</i>	<i>Research Governance</i>	<i>Mentoring Candidate</i>	<i>Mentoring Supervisors</i>
<i>Principal</i>	<i>Dr Z</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>40</i>			<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Associate</i>	<i>Dr Y</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>50</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<i>Assistant</i>	<i>Mr U</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>10</i>				<input type="checkbox"/>	

Example 7

<i>Role</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Supervisor Category</i>	<i>Load</i>	<i>Discipline Knowledge</i>	<i>Research Design</i>	<i>Research Governance</i>	<i>Mentoring Candidate</i>	<i>Mentoring Supervisors</i>
<i>Principal</i>	<i>Dr Z</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>40</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Associate</i>	<i>Dr Y</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>30</i>		<input type="checkbox"/>			
<i>External Academic</i>	<i>Dr T</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>30</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	

Appendix 2: Principal Supervisor Accreditation Program

The Principal Supervisor Accreditation Program is a program that consists of a series of formal training seminars on supervisor development and good practice in research training combined with a mentored, practical experience component. Academics who successfully complete the Principal Supervisor Accreditation Program (PSAP) may be deemed to have equivalency to a completion. This combined with being research active and holding appropriate qualifications will allow participants to be able to assume the role of a Principal Supervisor in a panel. Entry to this program is by nomination of the Associate Dean (Research) within the relevant School or Teaching Area. The program is of one year duration, and the Supervisor is expected to be active in an existing Supervision Panel throughout this time. The program involves:

- mentoring by the Principal Supervisor;
- participation in a series of required structured workshops;
- creation of a portfolio covering content from the workshops and reflections on the supervision experience, which is guided by the mentor and may form the basis of a future publication; and
- knowledge dissemination through presentations on an aspect of supervision, through a forum.

Appendix 3: Equivalent Experience for Academic Qualifications in HDR Supervision

If any nominated Supervisors at or above Category B do not hold the relevant qualification for the degree they are requesting to supervise they must provide evidence that they have substantial relevant experience, and are able to plan, direct and implement a research program equivalent to a research thesis.

As per the Equivalent Experience for Academic Staff Qualifications Policy, the Executive Dean must determine if an Academic Staff member meets the relevant academic, professional or practice-based experience to meet the requirements of supervision without holding the relevant qualification. In such cases:

- a. The Executive Dean must maintain a record of the determination and the required evidence on which the determination was based (as set out in this procedure).
- b. The determination must be recorded on the ECU approved template.
- c. A copy of these documents and evidence of approval must be retained with the Supervisor Register and stored in accordance with the University's [Records Management Policy](#).

Competencies

It is required that any Academic Staff member providing supervision of Higher Degree by Research Candidates, will have a substantial track record in relevant research, professional or practice-based experience at an advanced level. Evidence may include:

- Quality and quantity of refereed publications
- Evidence of peer review activity
- Evidence of creative outputs (Original Creative Work (live performance, recorded or rendered work, curated or produced exhibitions or events etc.))
- Competitive research awards, prizes and grants
- Past supervisory experience

Supporting evidence may include assessment of research standing and leadership and other peer esteem factors such as:

- Editorial board of high impact journal in their discipline
- Editor of a prestigious work of reference
- Visiting fellow or research fellow roles
- Fellowship of a learned academy
- Membership of a statutory committee