



## ***Research and Innovation Division***

### **HIGHER DEGREE RESEARCH (HDR) PROGRESS REVIEW GUIDELINES**

#### **Overview**

It is recognised that from time to time, problems may arise during the candidature of a Higher Degree Research (HDR) student. Long completion times and high attrition rates have frequently been identified as hazards associated with higher degree by research study. Some difficulties may be experienced in the progress of the project, in the supervisory relationship, or students may have personal or financial problems.

Overall, students have a responsibility to maintain progress of their research including the presentation of written material as agreed in sufficient time to allow for comments and discussions before proceeding to the next stage. The supervisor(s) must ensure that the student is made aware of inadequate progress or of standards of work below those generally expected, specifying the problems and suggesting ways of addressing them. It is expected that supervisors and students would attempt to work together to develop strategies to alleviate any problems. Heads of Units should be kept informed of student progress and any strategies developed.

Continuation of HDR candidature is conditional on maintenance of satisfactory progress. A supervisor or supervisors may draw the attention of the Head of Unit to problems with progress of a student at any time. Indeed, a supervisor is required to report immediately to the Head of Unit any failure by a student to make satisfactory progress or to abide by other requirements in the regulations governing the degree.

When a student is not making satisfactory progress or not maintaining adequate and regular contact, the student must be advised in writing of the requirements. (It should be noted that satisfactory academic progress is also a visa requirement for international students). The Annual Progress Report (APR) process for HDR Students is designed to allow students and their supervisors the opportunity to report on progress and to highlight any problems or issues that have arisen during that year of candidature. There may, however, be occasions where situations arise that need to be dealt with that cannot be left for the annual APR process.

It is equally important for academic units to follow procedures when dealing with situations when student progress is deemed to be unsatisfactory at a time that is outside of the annual reporting period. These guidelines have been devised to guide academic units through the correct procedures for handling unsatisfactory progress during the Annual Progress Reporting process or on ad hoc occasions throughout the candidature.

As well as these guidelines, unit procedures should at all times adhere with the Code of Practice – Supervision, Code of Practice – Research, the relevant Higher Degree Course Rules and Faculty Handbooks. Copies of these guidelines and the Code of Practice Supervision will be made available to students at the time of induction. The guidelines are also applicable if the student or supervisor disagrees with the assessment of progress.

#### **Supervisor Responsibilities**

The full range of responsibilities of supervisors is detailed in the Code of Practice Supervision. It is the responsibility of the supervisor(s) to advise the student promptly of

unsatisfactory progress with regard to any aspect of the research program, the agreed timetable or deadlines, performance in seminars, performance in prescribed course work, attendance, interaction with other students or technical staff, observance of laboratory or other practical guidelines (including occupational health and safety). The supervisor(s) must put this advice in writing if unsatisfactory progress is considered likely to interfere with satisfactory completion of the research by the agreed deadlines or create other problems within the Academic Unit/Department.

If circumstances arise where a supervisor becomes unable to carry out their normal supervisory responsibilities (ie due to a period of leave, or an unexpected and significant increase other academic responsibilities), then the supervisor, Head of Unit and/or Head of Postgraduate Studies have a responsibility to ensure alternative supervisory arrangements are made and that the student is advised, in writing, of any such changes in supervision.

### **Student Responsibilities**

It is the responsibility of students to inform their supervisor(s) of problems affecting the progress of the research as they arise. These problems may include personal, academic and resource problems. These problems should be documented formally by the student within one month of their occurrence if not resolved.

If a student does not believe that his/her supervisor or supervisors are meeting supervisory responsibilities as defined in the Code of Practice Supervision, then student should raise their concerns with the supervisor(s). If the student is not satisfied with the response by the supervisor(s), then he/she should raise the matter with the Head of Postgraduate Studies, Head of Unit or Associate Dean. If the student feels unable to discuss some issues affecting candidature with supervisor(s) he/she should contact the Head of Postgraduate Studies, Head of Unit, the Dean of Students, the RSC or a student advocate.

### **Research Proposal Reviews (RPR)**

As part of their responsibilities to Higher Degree Research (HDR) students outlined in the Code of Practice (Supervision) and the HDR Course Rules, academic units are expected to establish procedures for a formal review of the candidate's research proposal. This research proposal review is an important step in ensuring that the research project is based on a strong academic footing, that the student has the skills required to complete the project at the required standard, that the supervisory arrangements are appropriate to the project, and that the project can be undertaken adequately with the resources available and completed in a timely manner.

The review should normally be finalised **before** 48cp (i.e. 1.0 EFTSL) of the degree is completed, except for the PhD (Integrated) in which case the review should be completed before 72 cp (i.e. 1.5 EFTSL) of the degree is completed.

If it is determined that the proposal is unacceptable the student should be given adequate direction to improve their proposal and be allowed to re-present within 3 months. If the 2nd presentation is unsatisfactory the RPR Committee should make a recommendation to the Dean on the student's continued candidature. Recommendations may include: probation, termination, transfer/downgrade or other remedial action. If the recommendation is Probation or Termination of candidature then the Faculty Dean must refer this request to the Dean of Research who shall make a final decision after reviewing all evidence.

## **5. Annual Progress Reports**

A formal annual review of progress of all students takes place in the latter part of each year. Written reports from the student and the supervisor are an important and formal means to

monitor the progress of the student. Each report should be a forthright appraisal of the student's progress by both the supervisor(s) and the student. The annual report is the means by which the University assesses whether the candidature will continue into the following year. The Annual Progress Report form is made available on-line in October by the Research Student Centre to all enrolled students.

It is essential that the completion of the annual progress report is taken seriously by the students and their supervisors. When requests for extensions to candidature or scholarships are made, annual progress reports are consulted to determine whether delays were noted and discussed at the time, and what action was taken. It is important that supervisors provide accurate reports including any concerns they may have about the progress of a student. By noting these it provides the opportunity for discussion and for setting clearer objectives.

It is the responsibility of the student to complete the appropriate section and submit the form to the supervisor(s) by the due date. Ideally the supervisor(s) and student should meet to discuss progress and the completion of the student's and supervisor's sections before submission. In the unusual event that a student feels concerned about this procedure then the student should immediately notify either the Head of Unit or the Faculty's Head of Postgraduate Studies of any concerns. If unsatisfactory progress is recorded, the Faculty's Head of Postgraduate Studies is required to discuss the matter with the student and set out requirements that should be met for continued enrolment.

After the student and supervisor(s) have completed their sections of the form, the supervisor will submit the APR to the Faculty's Head of Postgraduate Studies, who reviews the report and makes a recommendation concerning the student's candidature, and then submits the recommendation to the Dean of the Faculty. The Dean reviews and signs-off on the report and recommendations before all reports are submitted to the RSC who will follow-up any problems identified.

Note that failure of the student to complete an annual progress report when required will result in the student's candidature being discontinued.

## **6. Probation**

If unsatisfactory progress matters are not resolved within the Faculty, the Faculty Dean may recommend to the Dean of Research that a period of probation is necessary. **Faculties cannot place students on probation. Probation is a formal University process that can only be imposed by the Dean of Research.**

The student shall be notified of the probation recommendation and will be given 20 working days after notification to submit a response to the Dean of Research. After this period, the Dean of Research shall make a final decision. If probation is imposed, the Dean of Research will appoint a senior academic (considering Faculty recommendations) as Probation Supervisor, **to oversee the current supervision process and research progress** for a period of not less than three months and not more than one year. At the end of probation, the Probation Supervisor will make recommendations, in a written report to the Dean of Research, addressing any perceived problems. The recommendations may include: continuation of enrolment; termination of candidature; transfer of award; change of supervisor or appointment of a panel of supervisors; including members from outside the academic unit. The Dean of Research has the power to impose any of the above recommendations.

If the student's progress fails to improve or remains unsatisfactory during probation then the Dean of Research has the right to terminate the student's candidature before the end of the probation period.

Prior to terminating a student's candidature or acting on a recommendation, the Dean of Research will review all documentation concerning that student's candidature held by the

RSC and will advise the student of the impending decision, so that the student can provide the Dean of Research with any additional relevant information concerning his/her candidature, supervision and progress. The student will be given 20 working days after notification to submit a response to the Dean of Research. After this period, the Dean of Research shall make a final decision. Students and supervisors shall be informed of the outcomes of the final decision in writing.

## **7. Grievance Procedures**

Any problems or disagreements encountered during the HDR candidature, other than allegations of Research Misconduct, that cannot be immediately or easily resolved between the student and the supervisor should be dealt with in accordance with the Academic Grievance Policy (Higher Degree Research students).

Issues relating to Research Misconduct must be dealt with in accordance with the Research Misconduct Policy.

## **8. Students' Right of Appeal**

If a student disagrees with any recommendations made by the Faculty in relation to their candidature, then he/she may appeal the decision to the Dean of Research.

If a student disagrees with any recommendations made by the Dean of Research in relation to their candidature, then he/she may appeal the decision to Higher Degree Research (HDR) Appeals Committee.