
Changes to Supervisory Arrangements Procedure

1 Purpose

This Procedure sets out the University's requirements in relation to making changes to a supervisory team and gives effect to the [Doctoral Regulations](#) and [Master's Thesis Regulations](#).

2 Application of Procedure

This Procedure applies to Supervisors and Research Candidates (Candidates).

Procedure Content

3 Context

- 3.1 The role of Supervisors is to support the Candidate, academically and administratively, to complete a thesis of appropriate quality, while adhering to the relevant requirements of Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington (the University).
- 3.2 The supervisory team is normally determined at the time of enrolment, and in most cases will continue until the candidate successfully completes their Research Degree. However, there will be situations in which a change to the members of the supervisory team is seen as desirable or necessary.
- 3.3 The primary consideration in changing supervisory arrangements should always be to allow the smooth progress of the research and the writing of the thesis to produce the best possible outcome for the Candidate and the University.

4 General requirements

- 4.1 The University expects:
 - (a) that any change of Supervisor be undertaken in a collaborative, respectful way;
 - (b) that any negotiation that takes place between parties in an attempt to solve a perceived problem is undertaken in good faith; and
 - (c) that those involved follow the informal process set out in Section 6 to make changes in supervision, with the formal process set out in Section 7 reserved for cases where the informal process has been unsuccessful.
- 4.2 Neither the Supervisor nor the Candidate has the right to make a change independently of the appropriate pathway in the academic unit (Faculty/School/Institute), as a change of Supervisor involves a change of workload for the affected Supervisor(s).
- 4.3 Any change of supervisory team must involve consultation with both the Supervisor(s) concerned and the Candidate.
- 4.4 If a change of Supervisor is requested, a "Change of Supervisor" form must be completed by the Supervisor or School representative and approved by the Head of School or equivalent (or their delegate) within Panoho. Initiating this form is normally the responsibility of a current

supervisor. The form can only be completed after appropriate consultation with both the supervisor(s) concerned and the candidate.

Note: A Supervisor who previously supervised a Candidate is usually not eligible to examine the thesis or to chair the oral exam, because of a possible Conflict of Interest. However, if there is a good reason for a former Supervisor to take on one of these roles, a case can be made to the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Research (Dean FGR).

5 Reasons

5.1 The following reasons will be considered where a change of supervisory arrangements is sought or required. Evidence of any one or more of these reasons does not guarantee a change will be made.

(a) Academic reasons, including that:

- (i) the research has shifted focus, and a different Supervisor is now in a better position than the original one to provide support; and/or
- (ii) the research topic has shifted so much that it is now aligned more closely with a different programme, or academic unit.

Note: moving between different academic units will require discussions with staff in both academic units, and agreement from the head of the receiving unit that supervision is available.

- (b) Workload issues, which may include the former secondary Supervisor taking on a more substantial role, and the former primary supervisor a less substantial one.
- (c) Leave requirements, though supervisors are normally expected to continue with research supervision when on Research & Study Leave.
- (d) Illness on the part of the Supervisor.
- (e) A Supervisor's retirement or resignation from the University.
- (f) The emergence of a Conflict of Interest.
- (g) In order to provide different support for the student in case of resubmission.
- (h) A breakdown in the relationship between Candidate and Supervisor.

Note: The Dean FGR will pay particular attention to any Candidate who requests multiple changes to their supervisory team or to any Supervisor who has multiple students requesting changes, to investigate and resolve underlying issues.

6 Informal Process

6.1 There are three approaches: Mutual consent, School-initiated, and Candidate-initiated.

6.2 Mutual consent

- (a) If the change is initiated by mutual consent after discussion between the Candidate and the Supervisor, they will make a joint approach to the academic unit to request a change.

6.3 School-initiated change

- (a) As the academic unit took on the Candidate in good faith, it has a responsibility to continue to provide suitable supervision for the Candidate, even if this involves employing someone external to the University in the role. If external supervision appears

necessary, responsibility for securing the external supervisor and funding the arrangement resides with the School.

- (b) Where change is initiated by the academic unit for administrative reasons, the matter should be dealt with by the Postgraduate Coordinator and/or Head of School (or equivalent).
- (c) Where the change is initiated by the Supervisor independent of the Candidate, the Supervisor should first approach the Postgraduate Coordinator and/or the Head of School (or equivalent).

6.4 Candidate-initiated change

- (a) Candidates need to review the information about the roles and responsibilities of supervisors and candidates on the [FGR website](#) as a first step.

Note: One challenge for Candidates seeking to change the composition of their supervisory team is that they may not have sufficient insight into standard supervisory practices, making it difficult to determine whether their concerns arise from actual supervisory issues or from differing expectations/perspectives.

- (b) Candidates should then discuss matters with appropriate individuals. It can be helpful to talk the issues through with fellow students or the postgraduate representatives at VUWSA. Where the desire to change supervisors arises on academic grounds (as outlined in 5.1(a) above), Candidates should discuss the matter with their current supervisors in the first instance. Where Candidates do not feel that they can discuss matters with their current Supervisor, they can discuss the issues with any of the following (in no particular order):
 - (i) Postgraduate Coordinator and/or Head of School (or equivalent).
 - (ii) Associate Dean (PGR) in the Faculty.
 - (iii) [VUWSA student advocate](#).
 - (iv) [Tauria – Student Interest and Conflict Resolution](#).
 - (v) Postgraduate Advisers in the Faculty of Graduate Research.
- (c) It is expected that any problem of supervision should be solved by appropriate discussion, and that it will lead to either an agreement to change Supervisors or a resolution of the issue without the need to change Supervisors.

7 Formal Process

- 7.1 Where an informal process has failed to resolve the issues, a formal process may be initiated.
- 7.2 A formal process is initiated by a request from the party seeking the change (the requestor) setting out the reasons why they believe a change is required. This request should be addressed to the Candidate's Head of School (or equivalent).
- 7.3 The Head of School will appoint a convenor (who may be from inside or outside the School), who will call a meeting between the requestor and a committee comprising the convenor, one other member of the School's academic staff (appointed by the Head of School and excluding the Candidate's Supervisor(s)), and the Associate Dean (PGR). Where the requestor is the Candidate, they may bring a VUWSA advocate or equivalent support person. Where the requestor is a Supervisor or other member of staff, they may bring a support person. The

requestor will have a reasonable opportunity to represent their opinion on supervision and any issues.

- 7.4 The same committee should then interview the other party before taking any decision. It may seek other information that it considers relevant.
- 7.5 The convenor of the committee must consider not only the request but also:
- (a) whether the matter might be solved without a change of supervisor; this could involve any of the following:
 - (i) discussion with the Candidate or Supervisor about realistic and appropriate expectations about supervision and styles of supervision;
 - (ii) discussion with the Candidate about whether it is appropriate to re-scope the project to allow it to be supervised by the current Supervisors;
 - (iii) requiring supervision sessions where two or more Supervisors attend; and/or
 - (iv) setting in place monitoring of the supervision.
 - (b) whether the School has an alternative Supervisor available; this involves consideration of the workloads of other members of the academic staff as well as matters of academic competence;
 - (c) if external supervision appears necessary, the School will be responsible for meeting any funding requirements associated with that supervision; and
 - (d) the suitability of other potential Supervisors, considering relevant factors, including any potential or actual conflict of interest.
- 7.6 The committee should communicate its findings in writing to both parties. Should any party be dissatisfied with the decision of the committee, they can request that the decision be reviewed by the Dean FGR.

Definitions

In this Procedure, unless the context otherwise requires:

Research Degree	means a programme of research and the writing of a thesis carried out under supervision and can include a doctoral degree, a doctoral qualification, or a Master's degree.
Supervisor	means a person who is appointed to provide academic and administrative guidance to a candidate during their registration for the degree.
Research Candidates	means Students who are undertaking a Research Degree.
Conflict of Interest	refers to a situation where someone is or may be perceived to be, compromised because their personal or professional interests or obligations, conflict, or may be perceived to conflict, with the responsibilities of their job, role, or position. It means that their objectivity or impartiality could be called into question.

Other terms are as defined in the relevant Regulations.

Related Documents and Information

8 Related Documents

[Education and Training Act 2020](#)
[Victoria University of Wellington Act 1961](#)

[Doctoral Regulations](#)
[Master's Thesis Regulations](#)
[Conflicts of Interest Statute](#)

9 Document Management and Control

Essential Record

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