



## Procedures for Changes to Supervisory Arrangements

The PhD is defined as “a programme of research and the writing of a thesis carried out under supervision” (PhD Statute), and a supervisor as “a person who is appointed to provide academic and administrative guidance to the candidate”. The function of the individual supervisor and of the supervisory team is thus to support the candidate, academically and administratively, in order to allow them to complete a PhD thesis of appropriate quality, while adhering to the demands of the policy and procedures current at Victoria, in the most economical and advantageous way possible.

The supervisory team is normally determined at the time of enrolment, and in the majority of cases will continue until the candidate successfully completes the PhD. However, there will be particular situations in which a change in the supervisory team is seen as desirable or necessary. The primary consideration in changing supervisory arrangements should always be to allow the smooth progress of the research and the writing of the thesis in order to produce the best possible outcome for the candidate and the University.

### 1. Principles

- (a) Neither the supervisor nor the candidate has the right to make a change independently of the appropriate pathway in the School/Faculty, since a change of supervisor involves a change of workload for the affected supervisor(s).
- (b) Any change of supervisory team should involve consultation with both the supervisor(s) concerned and the candidate.
- (c) If a change of supervisor is approved, the Student and Academic Services Office in the candidate’s home faculty must be informed in the normal way and records updated.
- (d) A supervisor who has ceased to supervise a candidate will probably not be able to act as an examiner for the thesis, or as the chair of an oral examination for that thesis, because of a potential conflict of interest. However, if such roles are envisaged for a former supervisor, a case must be made to the Dean FGR.
- (e) Any negotiation that takes places between parties in an attempt to solve a perceived problem must be undertaken in good faith.

## 2. Reasons

The following reasons may lead to a change of supervisory arrangements being considered. It is perfectly possible that despite some of these, no change will be made.

- Workload issues; these may include
  - the former second supervisor may take on a more substantial role, and the former primary supervisor a less substantial one.
- Leave requirements
- Illness on the part of the supervisor
- A supervisor's retirement or resignation from the University
- Academic reasons, including
  - the research has shifted focus, and a different supervisor is now in a better position than the original one to provide support
  - the research topic has shifted so much that it now fits better under the aegis of a different programme, school or faculty
- The emergence of a conflict of interest
- In order to provide different support for the student in case of resubmission
- A breakdown in the personal relationship between candidate and supervisor.

## 3. Process

The reasons for requiring a change will often determine the best process to follow. In many cases, if a change of supervisors is required, it will happen smoothly and painlessly, whether the impetus comes from the candidate or the School, because both parties have an interest in an optimal outcome. In many such cases, the change will be initiated by discussion between the candidate and the supervisor, and they will make a joint approach to the School/Faculty to request a change. In other cases we need to distinguish between School- (or supervisor-) initiated change and candidate-initiated change.

### 3.1 School-initiated change

Since the School took on the candidate in good faith, the School has a responsibility in such circumstances to continue to provide suitable supervision for the candidate, even if this involves employing someone external to Victoria in the role.

Where change is initiated by the School/Faculty for administrative reasons, the matter should be dealt with by the administrative supervisor and/or Head of School.

Where the change is initiated by the supervisor independent of the candidate, the supervisor should first approach the administrative supervisor and/or the Head of School.

### 3.2 Student-initiated change

One difficulty for candidates wishing to change the make-up of the supervisory team is that they may not be aware of the normal range of supervision practices, or whether the perceived difficulty is one of actual practice or inappropriate expectations. Refer to the FGR website for information about the roles and responsibilities of supervisors and candidates <http://www.victoria.ac.nz/fgr/current-phd/supervision.aspx>

Candidates may also find it helpful to first discuss matters with fellow students or the PGSA <http://www.pgsa.victoria.ac.nz/>

Where the desire to change supervisors arises on academic grounds (as outlined in §2 above), candidates should discuss the matter with their current supervisors in the first instance. If supervisors and candidate agree, then matters can be dealt with relatively simply.

Where candidates do not feel that they can discuss matters with their current supervisor, they have the following avenues available to them (in no particular order):

- Discussion with the administrative supervisor
- Discussion with the post-graduate coordinator/head of the PhD programme
- Discussion with the Associate Dean (PGR) in the Faculty
- Discussion with PGSA
- Discussion with the Facilitator and Disputes Advisor  
<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/disputes-advice/index.aspx>
- Discussion with the learning advisors at Student Learning Support  
[http://www.victoria.ac.nz/postgradlife/pages/pages\\_current\\_pg/support.html](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/postgradlife/pages/pages_current_pg/support.html)

It would be expected that any problem of supervision should be solved by one of these processes, and without the need for any formal process of resolution.

### 3.3 A formal process

Where a more formal process is required, it should be initiated only if all other, less formal approaches (outlined above) have been unsuccessful. It should begin with a letter from the party seeking the change (the complainant) setting out the reasons why they believe a change is required. This letter should be addressed to the candidate's administrative supervisor.

The administrative supervisor will call a meeting with the complainant and one other member of the School academic staff, excluding the supervisor, and the Associate Dean (PGR). Where the complainant is the candidate, they may bring a PGSA representative or equivalent. The complainant will be allowed to make a case to this group.

The same committee should then interview the other party before taking any decision.

The committee must consider not only the feelings of the complainant about the case 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 about realistic and appropriate expectations about supervision and/or styles of supervision
  - (ii) requiring supervision sessions which both academic supervisors attend
  - (iii) discussion with the supervisor about realistic and appropriate expectations and/or styles of supervision
  - (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 seems required, whether the School can afford any extra costs that such an arrangement may require;
- (d) observance of general principles of lack of conflict of interest on the part of supervisors and the academic and other suitability of the new supervisor (e.g. the principle that the major supervisor should be a member of the Victoria staff should not be compromised).

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.

Note: If any candidate wishes to change supervisor for a second time, the candidate should carefully consider why they might be having the same problems again, and whether changing supervisor is likely to make any real improvement. If any supervisor has two or more candidates asking to move out of their supervision for non-academic reasons, they should consider their own position.