Supervision
A guide supporting the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*  

2019
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1. Introduction

This guide supports the implementation of the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (the Code), which articulates the broad principles and responsibilities that underpin the responsible conduct of Australian research.

In particular, this guide is intended to assist institutions and researchers to adhere to relevant principles of the Code, including:

- Principle 4, ‘Fairness’, which requires researchers to treat fellow researchers and others involved in the research fairly and with respect.
- Principle 8, ‘Promotion of responsible research practices’, which requires researchers to promote and foster a research culture and environment that supports the responsible conduct of research.

The Code and this guide apply to all research conducted under the auspices of Australian institutions. These institutions vary in size, maturity, experience and organisational structure. They range from large and complex universities, to small privately funded institutes. Accordingly, it is acknowledged that different institutional policies and processes are capable of fulfilling the aim of this guide and attempts have been made to ensure that there are appropriate options for flexibility in its application.

2. Research supervision

Supervision plays a critical role in the responsible conduct of research. Although researchers at all levels of experience can benefit from high quality supervision and many may be called upon to provide supervision of less-experienced researchers, this guidance is directed principally to early career researchers, Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students and other research trainees.

The responsibilities of supervisors include maintaining not only currency in discipline-specific knowledge and practices, but also a working knowledge of the legal and policy frameworks that underpin responsible conduct of research at the disciplinary, institutional, and national levels. Supervision necessarily involves developing a respectful, culturally aware and professional relationship.¹

A supervisor’s duties may include providing mentoring, pastoral care or career advice. In these capacities, supervisors should familiarise themselves with their institution’s policies and be aware of any relevant services to which they can refer those being supervised. However, these duties are outside of the scope of the advice provided in this guide.

This guide does not attempt to replace broader policies or guidance already in place.² Rather, it is aimed at ensuring that institutions, supervisors and research trainees understand their obligations and work together to promote the responsible conduct of research.

¹ The Principles for Respectful Supervisory Relationships underpin the relationship between postgraduate research students and their academic supervisors.

² For example, the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015 sets out minimum acceptable requirements for higher education providers, including minimum standards for staff with supervisory roles for HDR students, and for institutions that provide ‘supervisory arrangements’. Individual institutions are required to have research supervision polices in place to ensure that they meet the Threshold Standards.
3. Responsibilities of institutions

This section provides guidance on the responsibilities that institutions have in relation to supervision of those conducting research under their auspices.

3.1 Expectations of supervisors

Institutions are responsible for ensuring that supervisors have appropriate experience and are supported in providing guidance on the responsible conduct of research.3

Institutions should ensure that supervisors have current knowledge of the methods and content of research in relevant fields or disciplines and are engaged in producing relevant research outputs in, or otherwise making original contributions to, fields or disciplines relevant to the research of those under their supervision.

Institutions should ensure that high quality supervision is recognised as an essential element of all research and academic roles within the institution, with expectations adapted to reflect the seniority and experience of the researchers and students in each supervisory relationship. Institutions should appropriately recognise that supervision is an important activity that has an impact on the supervisor’s workload and status.

Institutions should ensure that the number of individuals being supervised does not compromise the supervisor’s ability to fulfil their role effectively and in a timely fashion.

3.2 Induction and other training

Institutions must provide training and education that promotes and supports the responsible conduct of research and assists all researchers to follow the institutions’ policies and other relevant disciplinary-specific policies.

Each institution must provide induction training on the responsible conduct of research for all early career researchers and other research trainees, as well as to those who are new to supervisory roles. The training content should, at a minimum, incorporate the following:

- the principles and responsibilities of the Code, including the guides developed to support the Code, and obligations around reporting potential breaches of the Code
- the institution’s and relevant funding agencies’ policies and procedures relating to the responsible conduct of research and to dispute resolution
- research ethics guidelines and requirements, including:
  - the obligations of researchers using human participants and/or animals
  - relevant procedures for obtaining, and adhering to, ethics approvals
- the value of, and skills required for, engaging responsibly with research end-users including (as appropriate) governments, government business enterprises, businesses, non-government organisations, not-for-profit groups, and community organisations
- occupational health and safety and environmental protection
- technical matters appropriate to the relevant research field(s)/discipline(s), and

3 In some cases, institutions may require formal qualifications or evidence that the supervisor meets a recognised standard – e.g. credentialing.
• guidance for fostering respectful, cultural aware, engaged and effective collegial and supervisory relationships.

Induction training should also include material developed for researchers who plan to participate in research involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Institutions must give this training a high priority, ensuring completion as soon as possible in the careers of supervisors, early career researchers, and research trainees. HDR students should complete induction training before their first academic milestone or research output, or, as relevant, before recruitment of human participants or use of animals in research.

Institutions should also ensure that all researchers receive timely training in any new legal, policy, or procedural developments as they occur, as well as appropriate refresher training, in particular when promotion includes new supervisory expectations.

3.3 Alternative supervisory arrangements

Institutions must have policies in place to support the implementation of alternative supervisory arrangements when established arrangements are compromised by breaches of the Code or other factors that make continuation of the arrangements untenable.

If termination of a supervisory arrangement is necessary, the welfare of the supervisor and the individual under supervision are key concerns for the institution and support should be offered where available.

4. Responsibilities of researchers in supervisory roles

This section provides guidance on the responsibilities that researchers have when providing supervision to other researchers.

4.1 Modelling, mentoring and providing support

Supervisors serve as role models to less experienced researchers and, as such, have obligations to maintain a high degree of professionalism and current knowledge of their field or discipline. Supervisors should reflect on their own competence to provide advice, and seek support where necessary.

Supervisors should guide and support the professional development of those whom they supervise. This support includes providing guidance on upholding the principles and meeting the responsibilities of the Code.

Under the Code, researchers have the responsibility to:

R15 Provide guidance and mentorship on responsible research conduct to other researchers or research trainees under their supervision and, where appropriate, monitor their conduct.

The supervisor’s role should incorporate oversight of all relevant stages of the research process from conceptualisation and planning through to dissemination of outcomes, publication and follow-up activities. Supervisors are responsible for overseeing research proposals developed by those whom they supervise, including providing any necessary advice regarding steps that could be taken to
maximise the likelihood that proposed research will be assessed as having academic or scientific merit and as being ethically appropriate.

If supervisors are engaged in research with those they supervise, supervisors must ensure that the more junior researchers receive appropriate credit for their work.

Supervisors should strongly encourage the individuals whom they supervise to undertake and complete induction training as early as possible, as well as to undertake appropriate ongoing and refresher training.

4.2 Supervisory arrangements

Supervisors must work cooperatively with those whom they supervise to establish and maintain an appropriate level of engagement.

Supervisors and those whom they supervise should agree, in writing, on:

- the appropriate level of oversight of the development and conduct of the research
- the frequency and format of meetings
- expectations related to contact between meetings
- expectations related to the involvement of the supervisor in the work of the individual/s under supervision, or vice versa, on the same project, if relevant
- any necessary training for the individual/s under supervision (beyond that provided per section 3.2)
- the process for how to raise concerns and resolve disputes
- when and how the above matters will be reviewed during the supervisory relationship.

Where remote supervision is provided, supervisors should ensure that the individual/s being supervised are not disadvantaged because of these arrangements and should consider the use of appropriate technology.

5. Responsibilities of researchers under supervision

This section provides guidance on the responsibilities that researchers have when under the supervision of other researchers.

When being supervised, researchers must:

- ensure that their work is consistent with the principles of the Code
- demonstrate a professional attitude towards their research
- work cooperatively with their supervisor
- complete all induction courses as soon as possible after they commence their research roles.

Researchers under supervision should also enrol and actively participate in all appropriate ongoing and refresher training, take an active role in their own professional development and actively seek out relevant training opportunities.

Institutions should manage and investigate concerns or complaints about potential breaches of the Code in accordance with the *Guide to Managing and Investigating Potential Breaches of the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* (the Investigation Guide).

Examples of breaches of the Code that are related to supervision (see also Section 2.1 of the Investigation Guide) include, but are not limited to:

- Failure by a supervisor to provide adequate guidance or mentorship to researchers or research trainees under their supervision on the responsible conduct of research.\(^4\)
- Demanding or accepting authorship of a research output on the basis of supervision, where the individual does not also satisfy the authorship criteria in the *Guide to Authorship*.
- Repeated failure (by either party) to adhere to institutional policies and/or written agreements between supervisors and those under their supervision.

**Additional Resources**

- Australian Council of Graduate Research, Principles for Graduate Research Supervision, in Graduate Research Good Practice Principles, [https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/f39714_cac6d08553d84033ad3b1bc60a25b1fc.docx?dn=Good%20Practice%20Principles%20Final%20Dec%202016.docx](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/f39714_cac6d08553d84033ad3b1bc60a25b1fc.docx?dn=Good%20Practice%20Principles%20Final%20Dec%202016.docx)


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\(^4\) To determine whether there has been a failure by a supervisor to provide adequate guidance or mentorship, institutions should consider the seniority of those involved; discipline-specific expectations; the workplace and supervisory arrangements (e.g. remote supervision); and the level of institutional support available to the supervisor.