



AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF
GRADUATE RESEARCH

Response to NSW Ombudsman's Discussion Paper: Complaints about the Supervision of Postgraduate Students

Introduction

The Australian Council of Graduate Research commends the NSW Ombudsman's Office for their commitment to improving the postgraduate research experience for all students, particularly the handling of complaints about supervisors. We strongly support any strategies or initiatives that can support respectful relationships between students and supervisors and minimize, acknowledge and fairly deal with any conflicts that may arise.

In response to your discussion paper we would like to draw attention to the significant body of work, both in existing principles and regulations and current/planned good practice guidelines and support that already address these issues.

ACGR Good Practice Principles

ACGR is the peak body for university representatives engaged in the leadership and management of graduate research. Every Australian University and more from New Zealand and across the region are members of the Council.

The purpose of the Council is to promote excellence in research training and scholarship and to seek to maintain and continue to improve national standards for all graduate research degree programs. As such, the Council actively works to develop and promulgate good practice principles and guidelines. The ACGR Good Practice Principles (GPP) were developed and endorsed by all members and are available on the [ACGR website](#). These make specific reference to supervisor training and conduct, personal and pastoral support for candidates and complaints resolution and grievance procedures.

The GPP are also formally recognised by TEQSA as a Reference Point for the HESF Research Training Threshold Standards. Reference points are significant codes or frameworks that TEQSA recommends to help higher education providers in considering how particular Standards may be met or demonstrated.

All universities have in place codes of conduct or policies specific to their institutions that respond to these principles.

Going forward, as part of the recently endorsed [Research Training Implementation Plan](#), ACGR will develop guidelines to support universities to better manage and reward good supervisory performance.



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Respect Now Always

As part of the Respect Now Always initiative, and in response to the recent release of Changing the Course, the Human Rights Commission's report on sexual harassment and assault in universities, ACGR is also currently working with Universities Australia, the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations and the NTEU to develop some Principles for the Postgraduate Research Student – Supervisor Relationship. These Principles will cover many of the issues identified in your discussion paper. It is expected that these Principles will be finalised for approval by UA in early 2018.

Developing Respectful Research Training Environments

ACGR also has scheduled a full day forum on this topic for March 2018. Members of the Council will gather in Brisbane to consider relevant reports and hear from experts in the field and discuss what other resources and statements would be of most use to universities, students and supervisors to ensure that all understand their rights and responsibilities and that the relationships between stakeholders are equitable, fair and well managed. Outcomes from this meeting will be distributed nationally and may well provide an opportunity for collaboration or engagement with the NSW Ombudsman's Report.

Legislative Frameworks

All of the above constitute recommendations offered to universities to encourage good practice, and in our experience, all members of ACGR work within their universities to meet the standards described in a manner appropriate to their institution.

However we also note the mandated requirements that all universities must comply with. The TEQSA Higher Education Standards Framework, the ESOS Regulations and the Research Training Program are explicit about provider responsibilities regarding dispute resolution, grievance procedure and (in the case of HESF) supervisor quality and training.

Conclusion

In light of the current and planned activity relating to dealing with poor supervisor and student relationships ACGR would be concerned if additional guidelines were developed that may duplicate (at best) or potentially confuse or contradict that which currently exists.

We therefore recommend that, rather than a new set of principles or guidelines, engagement with policy/principles work currently underway or the establishment of case studies/support materials would provide greater benefit to the sector. ACGR is already



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considering such initiatives and would be pleased to liaise with the Ombudsman's Office and seek opportunities for collaboration.

For further information about this submission please contact
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