Rhodes University Policy on Supervision in Higher Degree by Research

Policy Volume	
Policy Chapter	
Responsible Committee/Unit/Division/Faculty	Research Office and Centre for Postgraduate Studies
Responsible Chairperson/Director/Manager	DVC: Research
Dates of First and Subsequent Council Approvals	December 2017
Revision History: Approved Reviews	
Review Cycle (e.g. every 2/5/7 years etc.)	Every 5 years
Next Review Date	2022

POLICY PARTICULARS

Policy Title	Rhodes University Policy on Supervision in Higher Degree by Research
Policy Statement (State in a single paragraph the policy mandate and how this relates to the University Mission and Vision)	As a research intensive university, with a significant proportion of postgraduate students, Rhodes University recognises the importance of providing high quality Higher Degree by Research (HDR) pedagogy and offering a supportive, engaging research environment, including ensuring the support for supervisors.
Reason for Policy (What this policy aims to achieve)	HDR is where teaching and research come together, as is acknowledged in the national funding formula whereby HDR students are funded in the 'teaching input' section and HDR graduates are funded in the 'research output' section. The practices and processes of HDR education are thus complex and cannot be fully attended to in one document. However, this policy aims to provide the broad principles and structures within which such education takes place.
People affected by this Policy (e.g. All units of the University)	This policy refers to all supervisors and students involved in Higher Degrees by Research, all Heads of Department, all Deans, the DVC: Research and the Director of the Centre for Postgraduate Studies
Who should read this Policy (People who need to heed this policy to fulfil their duties)	All those whose work relates to postgraduate studies in any way.
Website address/link for this Policy	

RELATED DOCUMENTS FORMS AND TOOLS

(University Policies, Protocols and Documents (such as rules/policies/protocols/guidelines related to this policy)

Relevant Legislation (Legislation/Regulatory requirements/Organisational Reports – name these)
Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework
Related Policies
Rhodes University Calendar Rhodes University Higher Degrees Guide
Related Protocols
Forms and Tools (documents to be completed in support of this policy implementation)

POLICY DEFINITIONS

(Technical or Conceptual terms used in the policy)

TERM	DEFINITION
HDR	Higher Degrees by Research are postgraduate studies that include a significant portion of supervised research.
Supervisor	A supervisor is the person responsible for mentoring the HDR student, for overseeing the research design, and for stewarding the project through the necessary processes.
Co-Supervisor / Collaborative supervision	The co-supervisor works with the supervisor to ensure all supervision roles and responsibilities are fulfilled. The co-supervisor might have responsibility for a specific aspect of the study or bring expertise in a particular area. The co-supervisor might be a novice supervisor who is being mentored by the main supervisor in HDR pedagogy. The co-supervisor might be part of a collective of supervisors. Regardless of the reason for the appointment of a co-supervisor, all supervisor are expected to play an active role in the HDR process and to work in a collegial manner that recognises the inputs of all. Co-supervisors may come from different departments or be external to the university. Where there is more than one supervisor attached to an HDR study, there must be a clear articulation of each person's roles and responsibilities.
One-on-One Supervision	In this model, an HDR student is allocated a supervisor or a main and co-supervisor and undertakes an individual study on their own research problem. Communication about the research is primarily between the student and supervisor/s only (Grant 2008, Manathunga and Goozee 2007)
Project Supervision	In this model, a team of HDR students undertake research into various aspects of one project. They might be supervised by one supervisor or by a collective of supervisors. Each person's role and responsibilities in the project should be clearly articulated and each HDR student needs to understand what their part in the project is. This model is common in the Natural Sciences but is increasingly being used in Humanities and Social Sciences too. Project supervision can include HDR students registered for different levels of qualification. The members of the project team have responsibility to the team as well as to their own project, including preparing for seminars, attending workshops, and providing peer feedback. Project supervision often includes preparatory coursework, even at PhD level where such coursework is not for credit. Specific progress deadlines might be negotiated for the team as a whole.
Programme Supervision	Typically programme supervision includes a hybrid with other models such that those in the programme also have a traditional one-on-one supervisor or are part of a project team. Programme supervision provides HDR students with additional support through membership in a departmental or interdepartmental programme which includes curriculated support events (such as an online forum, seminar series, 'Doc Weeks') (McKenna 2014, 2016, Lotz-Sisitka et al 2010). The programme is intended to nurture collegiality and to prevent a sense of isolation, while fostering a strong research culture. A version of this model is known as the 'cohort model' (Samuel and Vithal 2011).
Panel Supervision	The HDR scholar has a panel of three, four or five supervisors, but works most closely with one of the supervisors who is designated the main supervisor. The panel meets three times a year and prepares by reading the most recent work and attending the HDR student's progress seminar. There are fixed and clearly articulated progress deadlines. This model is sometimes known as the 'Scandinavian model of supervision'.

CPGS	The Centre for Postgraduate Studies offers a number of initiatives and events to support HDR supervisors, HDR students and to foster a strong research culture on campus.
HEQSF	The Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (DHET 2012) specifies the definition of each postgraduate qualification and its aims and outcomes, and it specifies the credits and thereby the notional hours candidates are expected to dedicate to each postgraduate qualification.

PRINCIPLES GOVERNING THIS POLICY

OVERVIEW
Rhodes University strives to carry out the following, as far as is reasonably practicable:
1. The roles played by supervisor/s and student should be articulated as clearly as possible and should preferably be arrived at through a process of mutual consensus. Agreement as to the supervisory process should be documented so that a clear record of responsibilities is created. (See roles below).
2. Supervisors need to be committed to the HDR scholars that they supervise and to their projects. This includes taking responsibility for guiding the scholar and providing such support as may be necessary and reasonable.
3. The university acknowledges that the Higher Degree by Research is examined primarily in written form and the supervision of academic writing (whether it be discipline specific, inter-disciplinary or transdisciplinary) is thus an important responsibility. While various initiatives may be put in place to support the acquisition of the relevant writing practices, it is largely through formative feedback on student writing by the discipline expert that such practices are developed.
4. The model of supervision is dependent on a number of variables including disciplinary norms and the requirements of the specific research project. There is therefore no requirement that a particular model be used. However, the university notes concerns about the dominance of the individual one-on-one model of supervision, which has been found to be associated with poor retention and throughput (ASSAf 2010, Cloete, Mouton and Sheppard 2015) and to exacerbate power imbalances and isolation where these problems are evident (Backhouse 2010, Harrison 2012). In cases where this model is deemed to be the most appropriate, the university endeavours to ensure that the candidate has access to a community of scholars and to a number of support initiatives beyond those provided by the supervisor, and that the supervisor too has various support structures in place.
5. All supervisors, especially novice supervisors, are encouraged to participate in such supervision development opportunities as may be made available, such as the national *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision* course.
6. The evidence that the most effective supervisors are those who are research active (ASSAf 2010, Cloete, Mouton and Sheppard 2015) is taken seriously. It is understood that novice supervisors will not initially have strong research profiles but all supervisors are expected to actively contribute to the relevant discipline or field or research area and to seek opportunities for their own development in this regard.
7. The criteria for appointment as supervisor vary from faculty to faculty. However, supervisors are ideally expected to hold a qualification one level higher than that at which they supervise (CHE 2004), except in the case of the doctorate which specifies the ability to supervise doctorates as an outcome (DHET 2012).
8. There are numerous issues that pertain to the number of HDR students any particular academic can supervise at one time. These include the nature of the discipline, the level of study, the model of

supervision being used, the varied other responsibilities held by the supervisor, and the needs of the particular student. No specific limits are therefore set, however HoDs need to monitor the number of HDR scholars allocated to individual supervisors and to take into account their other responsibilities and their track record of supervising students to graduation before recommending each new HDR supervision to Faculty Board.

9. Supervisors are expected to continue with their HDR responsibilities while on sabbatical leave. In cases where there is a co-supervisor or supervisory team, such responsibilities might be re-allocated for the duration of the sabbatical and the HoD and HDR candidate must be fully informed of such arrangements.

10. Additional supervisors might be added to the team at various points in the research process to attend to requirements for particular expertise as may arise. Such additions should be approved by Faculty Board in the same way that supervisor allocations are approved at the time of research proposal approval. If roles change considerably during the postgraduate process, for example, where a co-supervisor becomes the main supervisor, this should be reported to Faculty Board. Where supervisors leave a project, this should similarly be recorded at Faculty Board with a clear explanation. Where candidates are left without a supervisor (for example, through relocation of supervisor), the HoD shall be responsible for making arrangements with the candidate for a replacement supervisor as a matter of urgency.

11. Co-supervisors who are external to the university can be appointed but it is normally required that there be a supervisor internal to the institution responsible for amongst other usual supervision responsibilities, overseeing procedural aspects such as the approval of the proposal by the Higher Degrees Committee and the submission of the thesis for examination. External co-supervisors are expected to be made aware of this HDR supervision policy and the Higher Degrees Guide. They are expected to play an active role in the supervision process alongside the internal co-supervisor. Payment to external co-supervisors is dependent on arrangements made by individual departments.

12. Disputes between any members of the supervision team, including the supervisor and candidate, should be managed by the HoD or his or her designated representative, or in the case where the HoD is on the supervision team, by the Dean of the Faculty. Both the DVC: Research and the Director of the CPGS might be asked to assist with resolving the dispute. Where it is believed to be in the best interests of the research project and members of the team for a new supervisor to be allocated, the HoD shall be responsible for making arrangements with the candidate for a replacement supervisor as a matter of urgency.

13. Supervisors and HDR candidates are expected to complete progress reports on an annual basis. Where progress is not as desired, the Dean of the Faculty may write a letter to the HDR candidate noting the slow progress and enquiring if an intervention is required to ensure that the candidate makes better progress. Each faculty might set their own expected milestones and deadlines and determine how best to ensure that the progress by HDR candidates is appropriately tracked and encouraged.

14. The HEQSF (2013) specifies that up to PhD level 'candidates may also present peer-reviewed academic articles and papers, and, in certain fields, creative work such as artefacts, compositions, public performances and public exhibitions in *partial* fulfilment of the research requirements.' Combining academic publications and creative outputs with thesis submission has implications for supervision and for examination. Each faculty might develop its own requirements and processes in this regard.

15. Collaborative offerings such as joint degrees with other institutions need to be approved by the DVC: Research and the relevant Dean before any candidate is registered into such an offering.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

(Roles and responsibilities of Key personal/Divisions/Faculties/Departments)

ROLE	RESPONSIBILITY
ROLE 1	Supervisor, Co-supervisor, Supervisory Team

1. The supervisor is expected to be familiar with this HDR supervision policy and with the Higher Degrees Guide, along with the administrative regulations pertaining to Higher Degrees by Research, and any Faculty specific rules and processes;
2. The supervisor's responsibilities before the project begins, during the course of the project, and at the conclusion of the project are set out in detail in the Higher Degrees Guide, and these include overseeing ethical considerations and ensuring that ethical clearance for the project is attained as necessary;
3. The supervisor/supervisory team is expected to discuss with the candidate the roles of supervisor and candidate as set out in the Higher Degrees Guide and to explicitly discuss how they will work together for the duration of the project. A record of this agreement should be kept in whatever form is considered most appropriate. The candidate and supervisor/s should have access to this document. The discussion and subsequent agreement should, depending on relevance, include an articulation of:
- The roles of the various supervisors, co-supervisors or project team members, depending on the model of HDR being used; in the case where there are co-supervisors, supervisory teams or project supervision, there needs to be agreement as to the roles each member plays, including such aspects as who attends meetings, who coordinates and attends seminars and workshops, who provides feedback on laboratory or field work, who provides feedback on written work, and so on;
- How often the HDR candidate and supervisor/supervision team will meet, who sets the meetings, what form such meetings will take;
- Notional hours for the qualification and thereby the expectations on the candidate, including expectations regarding the development of academic writing norms;
- The form of feedback that will be given on the candidate's work, by whom, and how long they should be expected to wait for such feedback;
- Publication possibilities and expectations and what the arrangements will be regarding authorship, co-authorship and the order of authors named on any publications emerging from the research;
- Most importantly, the discussion and subsequent agreement should specify the planned progress with clear progress targets.
4. The supervisor has a responsibility to provide opportunities for and information about events (for example seminars, workshops and short courses) that would enable the collective development of the HDR scholar and strengthen the research culture in the institution.
5. The supervisor has a responsibility to inform the Head of Department of any conflict of interest that might arise in their relationship with the candidate. The supervision relationship is also guided by the "Protocol on Managing of Close Relationships between Staff and Students and between Staff".

ROLE 2	Higher Degree by Research Candidate

1. The candidate is expected to be familiar with the Higher Degrees Guide;
2. The candidate's responsibilities before the project begins, during the course of the project, and at the conclusion of the project are set out in detail in the Higher Degrees Guide;
3. The candidate should consider the roles of supervisor and candidate as set out in the Higher Degrees Guide and explicitly discuss how they will work with their supervisor/supervisory team for the duration of the project. A record of this agreement should be kept in whatever form is considered most appropriate. The candidate and supervisor/s should have access to this document. A few of the key issues to be deliberated and included in such a document are outlined under the role of the supervisor above.

ROLE 3	CPGS

1. The role of the Centre for Postgraduate Studies is to provide support to both supervisors and HDR candidates through the offering of seminars, workshops, short courses and collaborative initiatives.
2. Where necessary, the Centre for Postgraduate Studies might be asked to assist in mediation where disputes related to postgraduate studies have arisen.

ROLE 4	HoD

1. The Head of Department approves the registration of HDR students and their allocation to supervisors.
2. The HoD should oversee supervision workloads and progress of HDR students in the department.
3. The HoD is expected to ensure that supervisors are aware of this HDR supervision policy, the Higher Degrees Guide, any administrative regulations pertaining to Higher Degrees by Research, and any Faculty specific rules and processes;
4. The HoD mediates in any disputes as may be required;
5. The HoD should encourage the development of a supportive research culture in the department to foster HDR success.

ROLE 5	Dean

1. The Dean approves the HoD's recommendation for registration of HDR students and their allocation to supervisors.
2. The Dean should work with the Director of the CPGS to encourage the development of a supportive research culture in the faculty to foster HDR success.
3. The Dean should oversee the tracking of HDR students' progress on an annual basis and take what steps as may be deemed necessary according the faculty's approved practices.
4. The Dean acts as mediator in the case of disputes.

Role 6	DVC: Research

1. The DVC: Research has responsibility for strategic guidance for and the overseeing of HDR education in the institution.
2. The DVC undertakes institutional level tracking, works with the Deans and the Director of the CPGS to ensure that HDR students are well supported and that a strong research culture is nurtured across the university.
3. In the case of disputes, the DVC: Research has responsibility for intervening where necessary and to appoint any other person or committee to address such disputes as the DVC may deem necessary.

Role 7	HDC

1. The Higher Degrees Committee provides an academically rigorous engagement with proposed HDR research prior to such research being undertaken. This should be done in a manner that is collegial and developmental for both supervisor/s and HDR students.
2. This complex process of assuring the quality of HDR studies is through the provision of supportive and useful feedback which safeguards our HDR students and colleagues by ensuring that the committee believes that the proposed study is do-able, meaningful and ethically sound and that the HDR candidate has the necessary expertise to implement the proposed study.
3. It is imperative that the record keeping is rigorous and specifies the basis of HDC decisions.

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CONTACTS

Director of Postgraduate Studies and DVC: Research

POLICY REVIEW PROCEDURE

(Actions and processes by which the policy will be reviewed)

Policy to be reviewed once every five years or less if required. Review to be undertaken by sub-committee established by Research Committee and revised policy to serve at Research Committee, then at Faculty Boards, for final approval by Senate.