



**UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO**

**POLICY ON POSTGRADUATE SUPERVISION AND  
RESEARCH**

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## **1. Introduction**

Postgraduate supervision usually refers to the supervision or promotion of students' research activities leading in whole or in part to the awarding of a Master's or Doctoral degree. Postgraduate supervision is amongst the core academic activities for most Higher Education Institutions worldwide and is distinctive in that it provides a link between teaching and learning and research.

The goals of postgraduate supervision are both the production of a good dissertation or thesis and the transformation of the student into a competent and independent researcher. The supervision process is essentially a complex teaching and mentoring activity that includes a range of activities, such as:

- Assisting students to define a research topic and design an acceptable research proposal;
- Providing guidance on appropriate literature;
- Assisting with the determination of the research design and methodology;
- Supporting the students in the collection and analysing of data and writing up the dissertation or thesis as a final product;
- Providing detailed feedback to students;
- Meeting reporting requirements on students' progress; and
- Writing a final report on the research process for the external examiners and examining committee.

The policy and procedures for postgraduate research and supervision document applies to research programmes at the University, e.g. Master's by full dissertation and Doctoral studies, and also to the research components of coursework Master's programmes. This document on policy and guidelines for postgraduate supervision has implications for policy development, and the establishment of structures for research implementation and monitoring, and is applicable to institutional, faculty, schools, departmental and postgraduate programmes levels. At the institutional level, this document relates to

institutional policy and planning to assure the quality of postgraduate qualifications and to regulate and improve for procedures postgraduate research and supervision. At the programme level, the document relates to specific postgraduate research programmes, whose quality depends on the professionalism of individual supervisors, on the quality of the students, and on the more specific research capacity, facilities, regulations and procedures provided by faculties, schools and departments. The document addresses broader issues on postgraduate research and supervision. Faculties are expected to determine faculty and subject specific implications at programme levels

This document should be read in conjunction with the University General Rules on Master's and Doctoral research and supervision.

## **2. Admissions**

Admissions procedures are clear, consistently applied and aligned with the Higher Education Qualifications Framework. As far as possible, decisions about admissions are linked to funding opportunities for the students concerned. Regular selection criteria ensure that students admitted to particular research programme are adequately prepared to undertake the required research. Equity and access concerns are responsibly built into selection criteria and protocols; for example, if students do not meet regular admissions requirements, flexible entry routes could be provided through the recognition of prior learning (RPL), or alternative assessment protocols, which could include interviews, presentations, references, portfolios of previous work etc. Where the institution or faculty does admit students through alternative or flexible admissions procedures, provision is made for additional research training, language and writing skills development and support, both prior to and during the research process.

### **3. Approval of Research Projects**

Training for research proposal development is provided for students. Criteria for the approval of research projects include consideration of the following issues:

- The suitability of the project for the award in terms of the research questions and conceptualisation of the research;
- Suitability of methodology; and
- Analysis and scientific integrity of the proposed research.

Further considerations include that the student has the required research competences to complete the project; the evidence that a suitable supervisor is available; and the availability of facilities and resources for the completion of the project. Research proposals are approved by the relevant Faculties.

### **4. Rights and Responsibilities of Postgraduate Students**

The rights and responsibilities of postgraduate research students are clearly communicated to them, ideally in the form of supervision or learning contract. This includes:

- Specifying students' responsibilities for registration;
- The payment of fees;
- Communicating with and setting up appointments with supervisors,
- The nature and frequency of contact with the supervisor;
- Progress reports and monitoring of progress;
- Submission of written work;
- Meeting of deadlines; and
- Meeting assessment requirements and degree regulations.

The expectations of students with respect to observing research ethics, codes of conduct, regulations on plagiarism, copyright and intellectual property rules, rules for publication, sponsors' conditions, teaching assistant duties, and health and safety procedures are also made explicit.

## **5. Student Complaints and Appeals**

Open, fair and formal procedures are in place for hearing and adjudicating student complaints about the quality of the institution's supervision and support provision and for appeals against assessment decisions; these are clearly communicated to students. Students have the right of reasonable access to their records.

## **6. Provision of a Research-Conducive Infrastructure**

The institution provides a research-conducive infrastructure and environment for its postgraduate students. For example, students are inducted into an active research community, and provided with a suitably skilled and knowledgeable supervisor(s). Adequate research facilities and equipment are provided, such as Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) facilities, library facilities, study and laboratory space and technical equipment and accommodation. Optimal access to these facilities is available.

The University provides its students with opportunities for communicating and meeting with other students; presenting and receiving feedback on work in progress; effective student representation; and establishing postgraduate student associations.

## **7. Research Skills Training and Student Support**

The University seeks to build student research capacity, particularly for underprepared students, through a range of support activities such as:

- An orientation or induction programme;
- Research design methods and training;
- Research skills training;
- Language and writing skills development;
- The development of research and professional skills (such as research project management, information retrieval and database management);
- A mentoring system; and
- The provision of guidance and counselling in the event of difficulties.

Postgraduate students have access to appropriate student support and development facilities such as counselling, healthcare, and social and recreational facilities.

## **8. Funding opportunities**

The University effectively disseminates information on funding opportunities for postgraduate students, and provides support for accessing these opportunities.

Postgraduate scholarships and grants are available to meritorious students.

## **9. Selection, Appointment and Support for Supervisors**

The selection and appointment criteria for postgraduate supervisors are available and are strictly applied. Selection criteria include relevant qualifications, experience, expertise, peer recognition, research track record and publications.

There are guidelines for other considerations such as supervisor workloads, alternative arrangements if supervisors are to be absent for an extended period, co-supervision,

transfer arrangements, reporting and advice routes for both students and supervisors if communication breaks down or if there are concerns about student's ability to cope, and mechanisms for deciding to suspend and terminate a student's registration.

The University provides a framework for arranging supervisor-student interactions in terms of explicit roles and responsibilities, expectations regarding frequency of meetings, supervisor reporting and feedback responsibilities, and turnaround times and responsibilities with respect to assessment arrangements.

Support for supervisors includes an induction or orientation to institutional policies on research, the management of postgraduate supervision and the role and responsibilities of supervisors in the research process. Guidelines such as format for establishing agreements between postgraduate students and supervisors are provided.

Staff development such as in-service training, mentoring and peer support is available for novice supervisors.

## **10. Assessment of Postgraduate Research**

Assessment criteria and/or an explicit understanding of the quality of research achievement required, plus dissertation or thesis production, length, referencing and layout requirements, are clearly communicated to students on commencement of their studies, by means of faculty guide or handbook.

Internal and external assessors are appointed according to acceptable criteria; for example, at least one assessor external to the institution is appointed per dissertation or thesis. Assessors are appointed on the basis of qualifications, experience, expert knowledge in research area and independence.

The University provides clear guidelines to external assessors on the standard or quality of research achievement required, on the nature of their task and on institutional



assessment regulations. The requirements for assessment reports are clearly documented for assessors. External assessors usually report to Senate through its committees. There are clear guidelines on how assessment outcomes, corrections and further work are communicated to students and monitored by their supervisors. There are appeal mechanisms for students where reasonable and opportunities for them where applicable to defend their thesis, e.g. through an oral defence.

## **11. Monitoring and Review of Postgraduate Research**

The University Quality Assurance system ensures that the processes and outcomes of postgraduate research are monitored and reviewed regularly, usually at programme level. Reviews are based on the following:

- Data gathered from postgraduate students feedback on the quality of their learning experience;
- Supervision and support infrastructure;
- Assessors' reports; and
- Supervisors' self-reviews and reports.

Other sources of data could be feedback from external funders and employers as well as graduate surveys.

The University runs a central research information system, which captures and monitors overall completion times, graduation rates and postgraduate research output. Review results are fed into future planning cycles.

## 12. References

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