

3.8 Problems with the Supervisory Relationship

If there is a difficulty with the supervisory relationship, talk about your concerns with the supervisor. It is important to outline your difficulties or differences early on. The relationship between student and supervisor is an important one and it will not always be easy. Supervisors need at times to give comments that are difficult to take and students at times may believe it is essential that they ignore advice. Such events in themselves are to be expected but if it becomes clear that the candidature is not progressing satisfactorily or that the student or the supervisor continues to be dissatisfied with some aspect of the relationship then something needs to be done. You may like to talk to a counsellor within the Student Services Department about ways in which you can approach the discussion. You may wish to share your concerns with the School Postgraduate Research Coordinator or the Associate Dean (Research and Research Training) and ask this person to act as a mediator in discussion. If this person is unsuitable, speak to the OPR or the Faculty Student Advice Officer about alternative ways to approach the situation. It is important to not let too much time slip away with nothing very positive happening.

Section 4 outlines the services available to research students. You need to be familiar with these services as well as your rights and responsibilities within the supervisory relationship. Make sure that you are familiar with the grievance procedures within the University. Every attempt to resolve grievances should be made at the School/Centre/Institute level in the first instance. There are a number of different people you can speak to confidentially about the problem. Speak to the OPR, the Student Services Department, Student Union, and the Postgraduate Student Association about ways in which to resolve the situation before instigating formal grievance procedures.

3.8.1 Resolution of Problems

We have already recognised that problems can occur in the supervisory relationship, however not all problems arise from the supervisory relationship! The importance of meeting with your supervisor regularly and discussing any difficulties has been discussed. Discussing difficulties allows remedial action to be taken before problems become major. The supervisor may be able to act as a mediator or advocate for problems concerning administration or resources. The School Postgraduate Research Coordinator, Faculty administrative staff, the OPR or the Victoria University Postgraduate Association (VUPA) staff may also be able to help. Problems affecting progress should be raised in the bi-annual progress report.

Where problems seem to require intervention from outside parties, you should refer to the University's Grievance Procedures. The grievance procedures relate to perceived grounds for complaint or resolution of grievances concerning, for example:

- Individual staff members (eg supervisory relationships, interpersonal relationships);
- Administrative operations or decisions of the University (eg enrolment procedures, transfer of candidature, extensions).

3.8.2 Where to go for Assistance

Section 4 outlines the support services available to research students. In summary, the following assistance is available:

- Independent, confidential advice and assistance with grievances and unsatisfactory progress can be obtained from the Student Services Department, VUPA and the OPR;
- Grievances regarding discriminatory practices should be raised with the Associate Dean (Research and Research Training), the Head of School and/or the School Postgraduate Research Coordinator, or if preferred with an Equity Officer;
- Concerns about research ethics, including authorship and ownership of intellectual property, should be discussed with the Associate Dean (Research and Research Training) or the Head of School/Centre/Institute.

You should make every attempt to resolve grievances or problems at the School level, before instigating formal grievance procedures. For further information, please refer to section 4.2.