



LA TROBE
UNIVERSITY



Graduate Researcher Experience and Wellbeing

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 2019 – 2022
GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL

latrobe.edu.au/grs



Graduate researchers are a distinctive and valued group in the University community. Located at the intersection of the teaching and research agenda, they are research colleagues as well as students. They are often engaged in teaching as University staff and other part-time roles both within and outside academia. They are an essential part of the institutional research workforce and produce a significant amount of our overall research output, all the while being researchers in formation who have enrolled in a research training degree under supervision.



A new plan for our diverse graduate research community

Our graduate research candidates have diverse backgrounds. All have experienced university before but may be new to research.

They may have significant life experience and join us with different expectations; they often juggle significant caring and financial responsibilities.

Graduate researchers have distinctive and complex roles and relationships in the University, which means we must be nuanced in the way we facilitate their experience – we must apply broader strategies that take account of the unique identity, role and curriculum they inhabit and experience.

Graduate research sits within the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Industry Engagement) portfolio, and the Graduate Researcher Experience and Wellbeing Implementation Plan therefore finds its home in the Research Plan. However, the dual identity of graduate researchers as both researchers and students means that any implementation plan aimed at improving their experience and wellbeing must align with and build upon University research strategy, as well as concomitant strategies for student success, library services, student wellbeing, and teaching and learning.

Goals	Target
Outstanding graduate research experience: deliver a consistently high quality experience for all graduate researchers.	Top 12 in Australia and top in Victoria as measured by the Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ) Overall Satisfaction.
Graduate researcher employability: continue to improve graduate researcher employability outcomes.	Top 12 in Australia and top in Victoria for graduate researchers as measured by the Graduate Outcomes Survey.

Since the establishment of the Graduate Research School (GRS) in 2015, the policy framework supporting graduate research at La Trobe has been reviewed, revised and updated. In concert with the renewed policy settings, significant enhancements have been made to the systems underpinning graduate research student candidature, examination and progress management.

The launch of the HDR Data Integration stream of the PRIME project, which feeds information from the Student Information System into the University's HR systems, has further established the value and position of graduate researchers in the University's academic community.

The GRS has also accelerated partnerships with international institutions and significantly increased the number of opportunities for our candidates to engage with industry and the broader community through a program of internships, mentoring and the La Trobe Industry PhD. The Research Education and Development (RED) Team has strengthened and expanded its program of online and workshop-based researcher development activities available across the campus network.

Working with colleges and schools, the GRS has also developed a new University operating model for graduate research, by establishing clear expectations of Directors of Graduate Research, Graduate Research Coordinators, Regional Liaison Coordinators and Progress Committee Chairs.

The Graduate Research Experience and Wellbeing Implementation Plan builds on all of this foundational work to fulfil the University's objectives in relation to graduate research:

- a culture of research excellence
- outstanding research experience
- excellent candidate outcomes
- fruitful external engagement and partnerships.

Defining and measuring student experience

This implementation plan draws its evidence from the national Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ) and Graduate Outcome Survey, as well La Trobe's own Graduate Research Experience and Engagement Survey; its direction and goals for graduate research are aligned with those expressed in the La Trobe Research Plan 2018-2022.

The elements of the student experience for graduate researchers measured by PREQ include the following dimensions (as detailed in Appendix 1 on page 7.):

- supervision
- skills development
- intellectual climate
- infrastructure support
- thesis examination
- goals and expectations
- overall satisfaction.

In addition to these dimensions, the Graduate Research Experience and Wellbeing Implementation plan will focus on wellbeing and employability and their relationship to the overall student experience. We will take an integrated approach in considering 'the whole person', with consideration of each candidate's academic and social wellbeing, employment and studies, complex of identities and career aspirations. With this in mind, we will adopt a principles-based approach to structure this plan.

The six principles

Enhancing supervision

We promote a culture of excellence in graduate research supervision.

The quality of supervision is the single biggest factor influencing the student experience. Candidates have the closest relationship with their supervisors.

This relationship is uniquely personal and intense, with complex power dynamics at work and supervision teams, which often evolve over the course of candidature. When it is working well it enhances other aspects of the student experience, but when it does not it is difficult for any intervention strategies to negate the impacts on the candidate experience.

Belonging

We cultivate a sense of belonging to the La Trobe community, and a sense of connection to the global and local research communities in their discipline.

We aim to establish a strong sense of belonging and welcome at the start of candidature that will help build networks and relationships to support both the development of the research and the researcher as well as promote wellbeing.

Whole person

We take an integrated and holistic view of our graduate research candidates.

Actively listening to the student experience and inviting candidates into partnerships that support and enhance the student experience is a key driver for our approach. We will promote health and wellbeing programs to our graduate researchers.

Employability

We foster early identification and connection with career purpose.

We see and encourage our candidates to see a graduate research degree as a starting point, not an end-point; a purposeful, impactful and connected start with the world beyond academia. We aim to develop a climate that recognises and cultivates a connection between research culture (what am I doing), progress in thesis milestones (how am I doing) and career goals (why am I doing this).

Clear expectations to support success

We establish positive and realistic goals and expectations for each candidate's program of study.

We will make it easier to understand and interpret the University, including the expectations of staff and students. Information is clear and intuitive, aligned to the candidature lifecycle and will recognise the diverse needs of candidates as early career researchers.

Transparent and efficient enablers

We will support our candidates and staff with effective and purposeful infrastructure and resources for candidature management.

The administration and functional readiness of the University to support our candidates' research and personal objectives must be efficient, clearly communicated and recognise the complexity of whole people. This includes an effective candidature management framework, thesis examination process, supporting infrastructure and internal communication channels.

WHAT WE WILL DO

Actions and responsibilities

In describing priorities for improving graduate researcher experience and wellbeing, this plan sets out the key actions and accountabilities that sit alongside already established responsibilities of the Graduate Research School, academic schools and departments. The Graduate Research School is responsible for developing the strategy and implementation of the plan, communicating goals and outcomes, and providing a framework for training and sharing best practice. The schools operationalise at a local level, with school and discipline specific requirements in mind, and in daily contact with graduate researchers.

Theme	Actions – Graduate Research School	Actions – Schools and Departments
Enhancing supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with colleges and schools to develop a framework that determines expectations and measures of performance for supervisors • Redevelop and relaunch RED supervisor orientation and enrichment programs that incorporate “respectful relationships” resources • Establish an award for excellence in graduate research supervision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervision performance is reviewed within Career Success and staff are encouraged to participate in RED supervision programs to develop their supervision practice • Supervisors provide timely and thoughtful feedback • Graduate Research Coordinators facilitate regular discussions on supervision practice and intellectual climate in schools, departments and disciplines.
Belonging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow and promote the intellectual climate fund for all graduate researchers – with particular focus on improving support for part-time and regional candidates • Use the functional identity established through the Program for Research Information Management Enablement (PRIME) to ensure that candidates are provided with access to systems and initiatives that are available to researchers • Refine and enhance the orientation and induction activities for graduate researchers to align with the La Trobe Transition and Orientation Framework • Working with the Diversity and Inclusion, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Indigenous) and La Trobe International divisions, develop collaborative programs that enhance the participation and experience of underrepresented student groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all graduate researchers have access to local induction • All graduate researchers are invited to attend an accessible seminar program and social events in each department and/or centre • Accommodate graduate researchers with their most relevant cohort in collaborative spaces • Engage all candidates in school, department and centre activities, not forgetting part-time and external candidates • Working with Graduate Research Campus Liaison to ensure candidates across the campus network are engaged in school, department and centre activities.
Whole person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with the Psychology Clinic, develop a program for graduate researchers with strategies to manage personal barriers to success • Make available and accessible Mental Health First Aid Training for Directors of Graduate Research and Graduate Research Coordinators • Working with relevant stakeholders, implement the La Trobe Mental Health and Wellbeing Plan for graduate researchers and supervisors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directors of Graduate Research and Graduate Research Coordinators participate in mental health first aid training. Supervisor participation is also encouraged • Schools to promote information about University programs that foster and promote wellbeing for candidates and staff • Ensure all staff are aware of the broader University support available and key contact points across the University to advise graduate researchers.

Theme	Actions – Graduate Research School	Actions – Schools and Departments
Employability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand RED programs to incorporate employability skill development in alignment with the Career Ready Advantage framework • Review and expand the mentoring program to align with key candidature milestones and career objectives of participants • Working with Alumni and Advancement, extend engagement with alumni in career and industry programs for graduate researchers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage candidates to enrol in industry mentorship and internship programs • Identify new partners for Industry PhD programs to increase the number of opportunities for industry-focused projects • Discuss career aspirations of candidates early within framework of progress committee meetings • Ensure the process of promotion and selection of casual employment opportunities in schools is transparent and fosters employability.
Clear expectations to support success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor the effectiveness and use of the new induction checklist and progress milestones • Implement Progress Committee Chair training to support chairs in managing complex progress management scenarios and providing effective advice to candidates and supervisors • Review the effectiveness of the independence requirement for Progress Committee Chairs • Develop guidelines for writing effective progress support plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate expectations around candidate workload and attendance in local context in induction materials • Ensure that discipline thesis and examination standards are clearly articulated within the framework of progress management • Supervisory teams carefully and thoughtfully establish appropriate and SMART progress milestones.
Transparent and efficient enablers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise thesis submission procedures, processes and communications to reduce examination timelines and enhance candidate experience • Improve levels of customer service across the GRS using customer-first framework • Review and update Graduate Research School online resources to ensure clear and transparent information is available to candidates and staff, including advice on resolving issues • Provide all commencing candidates with up-to-date information about their access to working spaces, computing facilities, technical support and infrastructure provided in line with a refreshed support policy • Audit and promote information about research training subjects offered to graduate researchers, supervisors and graduate research coordinators • Working with the Planning and Institutional Performance Unit, establish a reliable and robust reporting framework that supports schools to have access to PREQ outcomes for their cohort. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure supervisors, Progress Committee Chairs and Graduate Research Coordinators are knowledgeable about relevant policies and processes to give clear advice along with thoughtful, timely and accurate candidature management and administration • Review school-level funding support mechanisms; establish and promote school-based programs for financial support of graduate research projects consistent with the transparency and equity requirements of the new Graduate Research Support Policy.

Appendix 1

Theme	Postgraduate Research experience Questionnaire (PREQ) Questions
Supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervision was available when I needed it • My supervisor/s made a real effort to understand difficulties I faced • My supervisor/s provided additional information relevant to my topic • I was given good guidance in topic selection and refinement • My supervisor/s provided helpful feedback on my progress • I received good guidance in my literature search.
Intellectual climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The department provided opportunities for social contact with other postgraduate students • I was integrated into the department's community • The department provided opportunities for me to become involved in the broader research culture • A good seminar program for postgraduate students was provided • The research ambience in the department or faculty stimulated my work.
Skill development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My research further developed my problem-solving skills • I learned to develop my ideas and present them in my written work • My research sharpened my analytic skills • Doing my research helped me to develop my ability to plan my own work • As a result of my research, I feel confident about tackling unfamiliar problems.
Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I had access to a suitable working space • I had good access to the technical support I needed • I was able to organise good access to necessary equipment • I had good access to computing facilities and services • There was appropriate financial support for research activities.
Thesis examination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The thesis examination process was fair • I was satisfied with the thesis examination process • The examination of my thesis was completed in a reasonable time.
Goals and expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I developed an understanding of the standard of work expected • I understood the required standard for the thesis • I understood the requirements of thesis examination.
Overall satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall, I was satisfied with the quality of my higher degree research experience.





CONTACT DETAILS

Graduate Research School
La Trobe University
Bundoora 3086

General enquiries

T: 9479 3640

E: grs@latrobe.edu.au

latrobe.edu.au/grs