



SUPRA

SYDNEY UNIVERSITY POSTGRADUATE REPRESENTATIVE ASSOCIATION

SUPRA Submission:

Draft Standards for Research, Research Training, and Learning Outcomes

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To:
Higher Education Standards Panel

I am writing on behalf of the Sydney University Postgraduate Representative Association (**SUPRA**), the representative body for the University of Sydney's 18,000 postgraduate students. SUPRA independently advocates for students, and represents them to the University of Sydney and to the government. SUPRA's professional caseworkers, who provide consultation with regard to submissions such as this, are quite experienced in the areas of postgraduate research, and have written extensively on topics regarding research, research training and learning outcomes.

We present this submission to you in anticipation of positive changes for the University's postgraduate students. We welcome any further opportunity to consult.

Kind Regards,

Kylee Hartman-Warren

SUPRA Vice-President (Policy), 2013

Introduction

SUPRA has experience working with Research and Research Training policy. In addition to advocating on behalf of students requiring representative assistance in the research area, SUPRA's councillors and student advocates have provided feedback on university policy addressing these areas, and continue to attend university committees focusing on Research and Training.

Overall, SUPRA supports the Panel's regulations regarding Research, Research & Training, and Learning Outcomes and SUPRA is grateful that the Panel is taking an active role in engaging stakeholders in this important process.

Below, SUPRA has addressed the three key documents by answering the questions specified in the Call for Comments, and by offering recommendations, particularly in relation to supporting students and researchers through minimum resources, protecting student intellectual property, promoting on-going support and training for research staff, allowing for independent advocacy and advice, implementing learning outcomes which prepare research students for their careers after graduation, and ensuring that resource to students, staff, and research are prioritised at all times, including times of cuts.

SUPRA wishes to thank the Higher Education Standards Panel for considering this feedback.

Draft Standards for Research

Q1. Do you broadly support the proposed standards for Research? If not, why?

SUPRA broadly supports the proposed standards for Research largely because they bind education providers to abiding by their own governance practices. SUPRA would like to see the Standards for Research include more specific minimum standards in a few key areas, so that those minimum standards are safeguarded and defined nationally, and not only in a university's own policy.

Q2. Do you wish to make any suggestions in relation to the specific content of the standards?

SUPRA recommends that the Draft Standards for Research hold universities responsible for ensuring that research staff and students have the minimum resources needed to adequately perform their jobs. Minimum resources continues to be a hot topic at universities as some universities do not provide the minimum resources outlined in their own policies, and yet others fail to adopt minimum resources policies at all. In 2010, The Council of Postgraduate Students Australia put together a document entitled *Minimum Resources for Postgraduate Study*, which can be downloaded at: http://www.capa.edu.au/briefing-papers/minimum_resources_2010. This document offers assistance to universities, student associations, and student researchers for “promoting and seeking continued improvements in services and support for postgraduates in particular in the area of minimum resources for postgraduate study.” (*Minimum Resources for Postgraduate Study*, p. 3). This document also outlines best practices in the area of minimum resources, and CAPA's work on minimum resources has led to increased focus on minimum resources in universities across the country. SUPRA wholly believes that a standard for minimum resources is necessary for excellence in research, and is desired out of necessity by students across the country.

Secondly, SUPRA is aware that some universities administer policies that attempt to claim ownership over student intellectual property, and SUPRA believes that the

ownership and management of student intellectual property should always be in the hands of the student, unless the student and university sign an explicit agreement which hands that intellectual property over to the university.

Finally, SUPRA believes that 'research active' staff require support as they aid in the research process. Training, for example, should be provided to research staff and supervisors, as noted in the '*Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.*' Furthermore, this training should be on-going and regularly updated to meet the most contemporary research needs. Finally, SUPRA has noted that many researchers end up burdened with administrative tasks, which limit their capability to focus on research and training students. SUPRA would like to see staff given the administrative support needed so they can focus on research and educating students.

Recommendations

1. That the Panel include a statement ensuring minimum resources for students and researchers as a part of the Draft Standards for Research.
2. That the Panel include a statement ensuring that intellectual property ownership between student and university is voluntary. That agreement should be voluntary, it must not be a requirement for entering into studies at the institution, and it must not be a requirement for continuing studies at the institution and there should be no disadvantage to the student for not signing it.
3. That the Panel include a statement which notes that staff who are required to engage in research must be formally inducted into their roles, and have on-going access to professional development and training.

Draft Standards for Research Training

Q3. Do you broadly support the proposed standards for Research Training? If not, why?

SUPRA broadly supports these standards but SUPRA believes that every research student should be encouraged, supported, and helped along through the research training process. SUPRA has never supported performance based management for staff, it does however find it odd that current performance metrics do not include any recognition of supervision.

Q4. Do you wish to make any suggestions in relation to the specific content of the standards?

SUPRA wishes to see a clause guaranteeing a provision for staff or students to access independent advocacy, advice and representation should there be a need for such in the case of disputes. References to representation and advocacy can be found in 2.2.4 of the *SSAF Advocacy and Representation Guidelines* (<http://www.comlaw.gov.au/Details/F2011L02726>). SUPRA has found that many disputes in the research area require a level of independent advocacy to protect the research and the rights of the student involved in the dispute. SUPRA strongly feels that all universities must take steps to make sure all students and researchers have access to free independent advocacy, should they choose to use it, when these disputes arise.

Independent representation also serves to protect students and researchers, and maintain a high quality educational or research experience. If universities are making decisions about research training it is important that independent and democratically elected representatives are there to represent both students and researchers.

Recommendation

4. That the Panel include a clause ensuring independent advocacy and representation for students and research staff in the Draft Standards for Research Training.

Draft Standards for Learning Outcomes

Q5. Do you broadly support the proposed standards for Learning Outcomes (Research Training)? If not, why?

SUPRA broadly approves of the idea that learning outcomes should be specified so both students and their supervisors have a clear understanding of what they are trying to achieve together in the course of their research.

Q6. Do you wish to make any suggestions in relation to the specific content of the standards?

SUPRA would like to see career preparedness be a part of the learning outcomes. SUPRA believes universities should be preparing researchers to further their research careers as they progress through their degrees. Students need the opportunity to consider the training needs they will want for pursuing a career after their research, and the universities should provide them with the resource and educational training opportunities and professional development to help students achieve these benchmarks.

Recommendation

5. That the Panel include a clause on learning outcomes which commits universities to aid students in training and preparing for their careers after they conclude their research degrees.

Other Comments

Q7. Do you wish to make any **Overall or General Comments** about the form, style, scope or any other aspects of the proposed set of research-related standards?

As cuts continue to occur in the tertiary education sector, many universities have moved to cut staff or their wages, increase casualization of staff, require increasingly unrealistic output from academic supervisors, and attempt to enter into enterprise bargaining agreements which slash protection, leave, and other benefits. SUPRA increasingly worries that this habit will lead to exploitation of supervisors and other research staff, and this will negatively impact the students' education and academic experience. We need improved funding and resources to ensure that these standards can be a reality, but these standards have no basis in reality without commensurate funding.

With this in mind, SUPRA desires governmental policy around Research, Research Training and Learning Outcomes to include protection, support, and rewards for those who train the students. Students should be supported and students, research, and research staff should continue to receive support and this should be prioritised in times of cuts.

Beyond that SUPRA wishes to thank the Panel for considering this submission, and SUPRA hopes that this Panel is as comprehensive as possible in terms of including SUPRA's recommendations.

Recommendation

6. That the Draft Standards emphasise priority of funding to students, staff, and research in times of cuts.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendations

1. That the Panel include a statement ensuring minimum resources for students and researchers is a part of the Draft Standards for Research.
2. That the Panel include a statement ensuring that intellectual property ownership between student and university is voluntary. That agreement should be voluntary, it must not be a requirement for entering into studies at the institution and it must not be a requirement for continuing studies at the institution and there should be no disadvantage to the student for not signing it.
3. That the Panel include a statement which notes that staff who are required to engage in research must be formally inducted into their roles, and have on-going access to professional development and training.
4. That the Panel include a clause ensuring independent advocacy and representation for students and research staff in the Draft Standards for Research Training.
5. That the Panel include a clause which commits universities to aid students in training and preparing for their careers after they conclude their research degrees.
6. That the Draft Standards emphasise priority of funding to students, staff, and research in times of cuts.

Conclusion

SUPRA would like to thank the Panel for engaging stakeholders and the student voice in reviewing draft standards for Research, Research & Training, and Learning Outcomes.

SUPRA believes that overall, these draft standards are strong and necessary to ensure the continued improvement of research, research training and learning for students and researchers alike. Yet, SUPRA would like to see improvements in policy, which ensures;

1. promoting minimum resources for students and researchers;
2. protection of student intellectual property;
3. ensuring on-going training and professional development for research staff;
4. ensuring access to independent advocacy and advice;
5. including training for careers in research as part of learning outcomes; and,
6. the protection and support of staff research supervisors;

SUPRA looks forward to feedback and further discussion with the Higher Education Standards Panel.