Postgraduate supervision is one of the most important roles in the University, and it's vital that supervisory relationships function well for both staff and students. The School of Music has established the following guidelines to facilitate the work of supervisors and postgraduates.

This document delineates the role of a staff member who assumes the full supervisory role throughout a candidature, (keeping in mind that a student may have two such supervisors in some cases of co-supervision), and illustrates a postgraduate’s responsibilities toward such a supervisor. But remember that the supervisory relationship is highly individual, differing considerably from one case to another.

NB The more specific guidelines below refer to the supervision of theses – a required component of all School of Music Research degrees. However, the general comments relating to the supervisor/student relationship apply also to the supervision of composition portfolios and of the preparation of recitals and lecture/recitals for DMA and MMus candidates.
Consultation

Postgraduates are entitled to frequent face-to-face consultations with their supervisor. 'Email supervision' is only tolerated in rare cases of external candidacy, and even then occasional face-to-face consultations are desirable, if they can be arranged. The Graduate Research School suggests that formal consultations should take place roughly fortnightly (for a full-time student), and in no cases less than monthly. In fact, the frequency of meetings will vary during the course of candidatures. Consultations are likely to be more frequent during the early stages of a thesis while the proposal is being developed, and less frequent during the research stage, when there may be little need for frequent feedback. Finalisation of the thesis, again, usually requires more intensive contact. Additional supervision/consultation of roughly the same frequency is normally provided for the preparation of composition portfolios, recitals and lecture/recitals in the case of DMA and MMus candidates.
Development of the thesis topic/creative work

The School of Music believes that candidates must 'own' their theses – and, of course, their creative work and performances as appropriate. In other words, postgraduates should formulate areas of study/creative work animated by their own interests or, better yet, passions. Successful candidatures are more likely if students are deeply committed to their chosen programme. Nonetheless, supervisors can help their candidates in selecting a research topic, while maintaining the student's sense of 'ownership'. Such topic-development is a delicate process, and requires sensitivity and patience on the part of both supervisors and postgraduates.

Once a topic has been identified, supervisors should aid the candidate in focusing, defining, and refining it. A prime cause of failed candidatures has been selection of topics that are too diffuse and undefined, or too large and unmanageable. Most novice postgraduates have little sense of large-scale research design. It's vital that supervisors guide them towards viable topics, and that students accept such guidance.

Supervisors should help their postgraduates in developing a sense of the field that they will have to explore. Aid should be given in delineating the relevant disciplinary discourse, and support should be offered in identifying the necessary research material. Students, in turn, should make every effort to master the necessary bibliographical sources and research techniques.

Most importantly, supervisors should play a major role in the development of the thesis proposal and completion of the complex 'proposal cover sheet'. Apart from advice about these documents, supervisors should read and edit a draft (and possibly multiple drafts) of the proposal before its submission. Candidates, for their part, should make every effort to develop the proposal as efficiently and independently as possible.

Submission of the proposal is one milestone in the new 'confirmation of candidature' procedure required of postgraduates during the first year of a full-time Ph.D/DMA enrolment (but not for an MA/MMus). Supervisors should provide support and advice to their postgraduates at every stage of this process. Apart from helping with preparation of the thesis proposal, supervisors must aid their candidates in preparing the required workshop or seminar presentation, attend that presentation and 'debrief' the candidate afterwards, advise on the development of the 'major piece of written work' required for confirmation of candidature, and critique that piece of work before its presentation to a candidate's supervisory panel.
The research phase

Once a thesis proposal has been accepted, supervisors should provide guidance as candidates pursue their research. It's important that students and supervisors discuss the insights that develop during the research phase, and that supervisors monitor their students' progress, ensuring that the thesis is on track to completion. The student has the obligation of discussing any problems that arise during the research, and must keep the supervisor informed of any changes to the project.

Supervisors should encourage their candidates to write as much as possible, as early as possible. Even fragmentary jottings about insights obtained during the research phase may later cohere into draft chapters. And both candidates and supervisors benefit if research generates the occasional early draft that allows assessment of progress and facilitates feedback.
'Writing up' and submission of the thesis

A vital phase in the supervisory relationship is reached when a candidate begins to produce draft chapters. It's highly desirable that a chapter framework be developed as part of the thesis proposal — in the full expectation, of course, that this framework will evolve throughout the candidature. Such a chapter framework should be linked to the schedule of research and writing incorporated into the thesis proposal, and reiterated in each annual report. Supervisors have the responsibility of monitoring progress in relation to this schedule. Candidates have the responsibility of keeping to their schedule, or of consulting with their supervisor if the schedule needs to be modified.

Supervisors have the obligation of reading draft chapters closely, and providing detailed written feedback, at least as marginal comments. Draft chapters should be returned to the candidate as soon as possible (a hiatus between submission and return of more than a fortnight is bad supervisory practice, and the Graduate Research School considers a hiatus of more than a month to be unacceptable). Drafts should be discussed at a sustained face-to-face consultation during which the supervisor's criticisms can be elaborated in depth. The candidate has the responsibility of presenting draft material to the supervisor in as 'readable' a form as possible. If a draft has been carefully edited before submission to the supervisor, it's more likely to receive the kind of intense conceptual critique (as opposed to mere correction) that will best benefit the candidate.

Once a thesis has been roughed out in draft, it must be rewritten and finalised for submission. Supervisors have the obligation of carefully reading such a final draft in order to ensure that it has the best possible chance of passing — checking its use of sources, testing the coherence and force of the argument, and assessing writing and presentation. This last raises the vexed issue of copy-editing. The University is clear that supervisors are not required to do copy-editing (in other words, identifying typos and correcting errors of spelling, punctuation, grammar, syntax, and formatting). On the other hand, no thesis should be submitted to examiners until it's free (as far as possible!) of such flaws. Some supervisors are prepared to do the necessary copy-editing, but all supervisors must ensure that their candidates' theses are submitted relatively error-free — whether this involves their own efforts, forcing the student to edit their work to the necessary standard, or recommending a commercial copy-editor (such professional copy-editing is allowed).
Rehearsal of recitals and lecture-recitals

With reference to performance candidates, performance supervision entails not only lessons and programming advice but also attendance and support at the final rehearsals for recitals and lecture-recitals. This is crucial to ensuring that the efforts and plans of both the student and the supervisor are realised in performances that may include external accompanists and associate artists. It is the responsibility of the candidate to schedule and manage these rehearsals, as well as communicate their desires and interpretation to their associate artists. The supervisor is obliged to observe the rehearsal for its entire duration in order to provide the student with feedback on their performance, management and collaboration skills, and provide any additional necessary support and advice. In the event that the performance supervisor is unable to attend, they should arrange for a suitable performance colleague to be present in their stead.

Examination of thesis/practical work

Supervisors are primarily responsible for selecting and nominating the examiners for a thesis/creative portfolio/recitals but this selection must be done in consultation with the candidate. In the event that examiners require revision or resubmission of any examined component, the supervisor must give the candidate every aid.
Publication

The School believes that its postgraduates should be encouraged to publish. To this end, it has established the requirement that students submit a ‘work-in-progress’ paper to the School of Music Postgraduate Seminar some time after their first year of candidature (this requirement is quite separate from the confirmation-of-candidature presentation). This paper, which is likely to be based upon a draft chapter of the thesis, must be written up in a form that would allow it to be published in an academic journal or as part of conference proceedings. The School very much hopes that the resultant papers will, indeed, be published. Ideally, theses will generate at least one, and preferably several, publications — including, in the best-case scenario, publication of the entire thesis as a book.

Supervisors have the obligation of helping their postgraduates elaborate a publication strategy. This should happen during the development of the topic, and no topic should be developed that does not allow the possibility of publication. If a candidate wishes to submit material for publication, the supervisor must offer advice about suitable journals or publishers, and read and edit the candidate's manuscripts to ensure maximum publishability. This obligation continues after completion of a thesis, as students' publications based on their postgraduate research continue to count towards the School's research quota even if published after graduation.

Postgraduate candidates, in turn, have an obligation to seek publication during their candidacy, at least by presenting the best 'work-in-progress' paper of which they are capable. The School of Humanities, in order to encourage postgraduate publication and to recognise its students' endeavours, has established a publication grant. Each student publication recognised by the University's research administration (basically measuring the academic respectability of the publication) will receive $500.00 for the first publication during a candidacy, and $250 for subsequent publications.
After Graduation

Supervisors' responsibilities don't end with their candidates' graduation. Apart from helping their graduates with publication, it may be necessary to advise on postdoctoral opportunities, and to support their former postgraduates in launching their careers, not least by writing references.

Postgraduates or supervisors who wish to discuss these requirements, or who need further information, may consult the Postgraduate Coordinator for the Schools of Humanities and Music, Rob Stuart (Room 1.17 in the Arts Building or by appointment in the School of Music on Fridays; phone 6488 2127; email robert.stuart@uwa.edu.au).

For the University's framework policies on postgraduate supervision, please consult the 'Guidelines for Graduate Research Supervisors' at http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/policies/supervisor_guidelines