

Statement of Response from the Chair of the Graduate Research Committee re *The Monash Postgraduate Association (MPA) submission to the Graduate Research Committee in response to HDR candidature policy changes*

The Monash Postgraduate Association (MPA) has presented fifteen recommendations to the Graduate Research Committee (GRC) in specific response to graduate research policy changes implemented 2013 to 2015. These recommendations include requests to reconsider – and in some cases abandon – changes to progress management, the management of enrolment variations, re-admission, and PhD training and coursework requirements.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge MPA's constructive efforts, and reiterate my commitment to ongoing dialogue on these issues with MPA and the broader graduate research student community. I welcome this opportunity to bring these matters to the University's attention via GRC, and would like to thank MPA for its ongoing commitment to advocating for graduate research students on all such changes to policy and procedure.

I have carefully considered each recommendation, and my responses are below.

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RETROSPECTIVE APPLICATION OF POLICY CHANGES

Recommendation 1: That all research postgraduates have their candidatures governed by the conditions in place at the time of enrolment

I acknowledge that changes to candidature rules have an impact on candidates. However, the University reserves the right to make such changes as required, and brings this to the direct attention of graduate research students when they commence enrolment with the University and during the annual re-enrolment cycle.

Specifically, the University requires students to *acknowledge, agree and consent* to the following statement via its *Course Enrolment Form* at initial enrolment and via the Web Enrolment System (WES) at re-enrolment:

I agree to be bound by the statutes, regulations, policies and procedures of the university as amended from time to time and agree to pay all fees, levies and charges directly arising from my enrolment.

That being said, the University does not seek to take unnecessary advantage of that consent. Amendments to policy are only made in response to systemic issues within a current policy or practice, requirements under the University's quality assurance cycle, or in response to changes in the University's strategic direction or external environment. It is important to note that the Monash University Institute of Graduate Research (MIGR) has no current delegation to approve academic policy;¹ rather, policy is *endorsed* by the Graduate Research Committee and *approved* by Academic Board.

Amendments to policy are driven by multiple factors, both internal and external to the University. Some amendments must be undertaken in order for the University to comply with larger legislative frameworks, with the introduction of the Sanctions Compliance Policy being one such example, the purpose of which is to provide "a legal compliance framework to maintain and monitor compliance with Australia's Sanctions Laws." Therefore, the notion that the University can maintain status quo throughout a student's enrolment is not always feasible, practical or possible. This is particularly the case for students enrolled on a part-time basis, where enrolment is necessarily extended over a period of time, and therefore potentially vulnerable to the vagaries of changes in government and government policy. This is also the case for international students on Australian student visas.

The University's quality assurance cycle itself compels regular review of policies and procedures. The University defines quality assurance as a process of planning, investigating and evaluating policy and procedure "in order to generate improvement."²

An example of a policy subject to this quality assurance cycle - and subsequently amended for the purposes of improvement - is the *Graduate Research Progress Management Policy*, which is an *amendment* to the *Candidature Progress Management Policy* and supporting procedures originally approved by Academic Board in 2011.

¹ The specific role of the Monash University Institute of Graduate Research (MIGR) is to "support the Graduate Research Committee in carrying out its functions and duties." See regulation 21 of the Monash University (Vice-Chancellor) Regulations at <http://monash.edu.au/legal/legislation/current-statute-regulations-and-related-resolutions/monash-university-vice-chancellor-regulations-with-amendments.pdf>; accessed 17 July 2015.

² See Monash Quality Unit website at <http://opq.monash.edu.au/mqu/quality-cycle.html>; accessed 15 July 2015.

The *Candidature Progress Management Policy* (and its two supporting procedures) was set for review in December 2013. This provided an opportunity to evaluate how this policy was functioning, as well as to consider some broader, inter-related issues around leave provisions, integrity of student record-keeping and compliance, and decision-making as it applies to graduate research progress management.

Direct impetus and support for this exercise was provided by the Research Administration Strengthening (RAS) Project, which had been established to support the Professionalising Research Management pillar of the *Monash Research Strategy 2011-2015*, with its focus on “enhanc[ing] Monash’s strategic focus and investment in research performance and enable the overarching objective of achieving impact through research relevance and excellence”.³

Some key issues and challenges were identified as follows:

1. Poor doctoral student completion rates across the University, with the overall completion rate of doctoral students who commenced their enrolment in 2009 being 34.5%, with a further 30.2% of this cohort having either discontinued or been discontinued.⁴
2. Lack of a centrally-prescribed mid candidature progress review for research master’s students, with anecdotal evidence indicating that “candidature drift” was a common experience of students following successful completion of their only milestone, confirmation. This was supported by less than optimal completion rates for research master’s students, and protracted enrolment where completion did in fact ensue.
3. Failure on the part of the University community to give due and serious attention to the importance of the Mid Candidature Review (MCR) and Pre-Submission Seminar (PSS) milestones, as evidenced by consistently high numbers of students being identified and reported on as having failed to complete either the MCR or PSS milestone by the due date. Some students were found to not have completed both a confirmation and a MCR milestone.

This is despite the fact that the University stated in its *Handbook for Doctoral Degrees* that, with limited exceptions,⁵ all doctoral students commencing 1 January 2010 were “required to undergo the mid-candidature review between 21 and 27 months equivalent full-time candidature.”⁶ Likewise, they were also “required to give an oral presentation and thesis/exegesis summary at a pre-submission seminar no later than six months prior to the candidature end date.”⁷

4. Overly complex leave provisions (with multiple types and categories of leave) and a culture of backdating such provisions, the practice of which directly contravenes the University’s obligations under Education for Overseas Students (ESOS) and Higher Education Student governmental reporting requirements.

³ <http://intranet.monash.edu.au/research/research-admin-strengthening/index.html>; accessed 15 July 2015.

⁴ Based on data downloaded from the Business Intelligence System as at 21 March 2014.

⁵ Exemptions included students enrolled in the Staff PhD, Doctor of Medicine (unsupervised), joint award or Cotutelle Agreements, and IITB-Monash students. See <http://intranet.monash.edu.au/migr/handbook/archive/2012/handbook/3-10.html>; accessed 15 July 2015.

⁶ See *Handbook for Doctoral Degrees 2013*; available from <http://intranet.monash.edu.au/migr/handbook/archive/2012/handbook/3-10.html>; accessed 15 July 2015.

⁷ See *Handbook for Doctoral Degrees 2013*; available from <http://intranet.monash.edu.au/migr/handbook/archive/2012/handbook/3-11.html>; accessed 15 July 2015.

5. Contradictions in the lapsed candidature policy as stated in the *Handbook for Doctoral Degrees* and *Handbook for Research Master's Degrees*. On the one hand, this policy correctly stated that a "lapsed candidate will no longer be considered a student of Monash University and will not have student access to the facilities and resources at the University." Yet on the other hand, the policy only allowed a lapsed former student to submit their thesis for examination any time within three calendar years of the lapse of his/her candidature if they could demonstrate "clear evidence of continued contact between the candidate and supervisor over the period of lapsed candidature."⁸ The University could not justify maintaining a policy that could not be sensibly applied: you cannot disallow a former lapsed student from accessing the very resources (such as supervision) that are in fact a precondition of meeting the requirements of thesis submission. The misuse of the term "student" in relation to lapsed candidature was itself a form of obfuscation that compounded the problem; definitions of a student are found in the Monash University (Council) Regulations, and do not include lapsed enrolment arrangements.
6. Significant compliance issues around the backdating of enrolment, meaning that the University could not confidently state that it was in fact complying with its own *Monash University Recordkeeping Policy* (and in turn the Public Records Act [Vic] 1973), the ESOS Act and its obligations under government reporting, the details of which will be provided under the response to the MPA's recommendation 7.

Concluding Comment:

- Amendments to policy which impact on current students must be made from time to time. This is not only a policy requirement; it also has ethical implications and dimensions too. For example, if the milestone framework is not being adhered to, then its capacity to support students is also compromised. While I concede that the changes have brought about greater accountability – and that this is being interpreted as intrusive by a number of students – it is not unreasonable on the part of the University to insist on accountability in relation to resources provided and finances paid, much of which is public funding that the University is entrusted to distribute and account for accordingly. The experience of greater accountability is also not specific to students; it is also being applied equally to supervisors to ensure that they are sufficiently qualified and able to discharge their roles and responsibilities appropriately.
- It is also important for us to be proportionate in the impact of these changes, and critically evaluate them in context. For example, students who enrolled in their PhD prior to 2015 have not had the timing of their milestone reviews retrospectively re-configured: students can still undertake these reviews according to pre-existing timeframes, which include a generous "built in" extension to the Mid Candidature Review milestone, which students undertake between 21 and 27 months of equivalent full time enrolment. The duration of their enrolment also remains unchanged and they are still entitled to apply for up to 6 months in extensions beyond their four years equivalent full time enrolment.
- I do, however, concede that the approach to approving (or not approving) thesis submission date extension requests has at times been too blunt. This is an implementation matter rather than a policy fault. Staff within my portfolio are actively

⁸ See *Handbook for Doctoral Degrees 2013*, available from <http://intranet.monash.edu.au/migr/handbook/archive/2012/handbook/4-4.html>; accessed 15 July 2015.

seeking to work on protocols to ensure that the application of this policy is subtle and nuanced to the specific circumstances of the student.

ALL MILESTONES BECOMING HURDLES

Recommendation 2: That the mid-candidature review and pre-submission (final) review revert to being milestones instead of hurdles

I disagree with your characterisation “that the change from milestone to hurdle requirements...seems only to provide an easy point at which the university can terminate candidature.”

The *Graduate Research Progress Management Policy* in fact explicitly states that its purpose is to provide “a milestone review framework to support HDR students to undertake research of an appropriate quality, originality and depth as required by their course of study for their approved research project,” with the milestones intended as a “mechanism to identify and support students who are experiencing progress difficulties in their study program.”⁹

All students, if they do not successfully achieve a milestone at first attempt, are automatically given the right to achieve that milestone via a second attempt. In considering how long a student should be given in order to meet those requirements a second time, the supporting *Guidelines for Chairs of Milestone Review Panels and Academic Progress Review Panels* state that “In making its decision, the chair and members of the MRP need to consider all factors, and whether, if there are progress issues, mitigating circumstances may apply.”¹⁰

Milestone Review Panels are directly called upon to ensure procedural fairness and natural justice is applied to the student, as follows:

34. It is the role of the chair and panel members of the MRP to ensure procedural fairness, or natural justice, is applied to the student where unsatisfactory progress has been identified. Procedural fairness is concerned with the process used to reach a decision, rather than the actual outcome reached. It requires that a fair process be used to reach a decision.

35. Procedural fairness consists of three broad principles:

- The student must be provided with a reasonable opportunity to prepare a response;
- The student is provided with an adequate opportunity to present their response; and
- The MRP is to make reasonable inquiries before making a decision, and act in good faith. This includes a freedom from bias, or the appearance of bias, and to make a decision based on a balanced and considered assessment of the information and evidence placed before it.

⁹ See Graduate Research Progress Management Policy, available from <http://policy.monash.edu.au/policy-bank/academic/research/mrgs/grad-research-progress-mgmt-policy.html>; accessed 17 July 2015.

¹⁰ See *Guidelines for Chairs of Milestone Review Panel and Academic Progress Review Panels*, available from <http://policy.monash.edu.au/policy-bank/academic/research/mrgs/guidelines-milestone-review-panel-and-apr-panels.html>; accessed 17 July 2015.

36. A decision by the MRP must be based upon evidence and not on speculation. The panel's standard of proof must be based on a balance of probabilities.¹¹

The recommendation to terminate a student's enrolment is itself not a foregone conclusion. I would like to emphasise that any recommendation to terminate enrolment arising from either a Milestone Review Panel or Academic Progress Review Panel must be presented to the Academic Director (Graduate Research) who then reviews it against the available evidence and in accordance with the application of policy and procedures. Under the procedures, the Academic Director (Graduate Research) has the authority to dismiss such a recommendation and will do so where procedural errors are observed. Even where a student is issued with a termination letter, they maintain the right to appeal that decision to the Chair of the Graduate Research Committee.

It is deeply regrettable that the new milestone review framework has been experienced by some students as managerial interventionism. If that is indeed the tone of a milestone review, then it is clearly not being undertaken in accordance with the spirit and intent of the policy at the departmental level. A core element of a milestone is to provide the student with the opportunity to present their research to their peers and build their skills in writing and orally defending their work. Ultimately, as a University, we cannot shield students from the necessity of being subject to peer review; such a process is, after all, fundamental to the very nature of undertaking research, and is something we all undergo throughout our academic life. If a milestone review process is not sufficiently rigorous, then it may leave students exposed to a potentially poor and devastating examination outcome. We have to be prepared to accept the fact that milestones sometimes bring about difficult conversations – with the student AND their supervisors. We have had cases where a milestone review process has directly intervened in poor supervisory practices for the sake and benefit of the student. All are called to account through the milestone review process and I feel that your statement that the University “takes no responsibility for poor supervision and inadequate supervision” is incorrect and quite counterproductive.¹²

However, at the same time, we must acknowledge the institutional context. The University has clearly stated via Focus Monash that timely completions are a key element of its strategic direction. The *Graduate Research Progress Management Policy* is the University's response to this timely completion proposition in the context of graduate research.

Lastly, we cannot ignore our compliance requirements under the *National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2007*. Standard 9 of this Code, for example, states that registered “providers monitor the workload of students to ensure they complete the course within the duration specified in their CoE [Confirmation of Enrolment] and do not exceed the allowable portion of online or distance learning. Registered providers only enable students to extend the expected duration of study for the course through the issuing of a new CoE in limited circumstances.”¹³ Standard 10 of the Code states that registered “providers systematically monitor students' course progress. Registered providers are proactive in notifying and counselling students who are at risk of failing to meet their course progress requirements.”

¹¹ See *Guidelines for Chairs of Milestone Review Panel and Academic Progress Review Panels*, available from <http://policy.monash.edu.au/policy-bank/academic/research/mrgs/guidelines-milestone-review-panel-and-apr-panels.html>; accessed 17 July 2015.

¹² Quoted from page 6 of the MPA submission.

¹³ See National Code Part D, Standard 9; available from <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/Regulatory-Information/Education-Services-for-Overseas-Students-ESOS-Legislative-Framework/National-Code/nationalcodepartd/Pages/ExplanatoryguideD9.aspx>; accessed 17 July 2015.

The registered provider must also “monitor, record and assess the course progress of each student for each unit of the course for which the student is enrolled in accordance with the registered provider’s documented course progress policies and procedures.”¹⁴

Concluding remarks

It is correct to say that the Mid Candidature Review and Pre-Submission Seminar were not formally defined as hurdle requirements in the way that they now are under the amended *Graduate Research Progress Management Procedures*. Under these procedures, a hurdle requirement means that the “student must satisfactorily achieve the requirements of the milestone in order to remain enrolled. A failure to meet the requirements of a milestone means that the student is deemed to be making unsatisfactory progress.”¹⁵ However, it is not correct to say that these milestones were previously somehow voluntary and devoid of material consequences. At any point, under the previous procedures, the University could initiate unsatisfactory progress proceedings, and there was nothing to prevent it from doing so in response to a student’s presentation at either the Mid Candidature Review or Pre-Submission Seminar.

The University has certainly integrated unsatisfactory progress processes under the new framework; however, integration does not automatically mean the elision of rights and accountability. If anything, the accountability is now greater because the purpose of each milestone is clearer, along with roles and responsibilities within the milestone review process.

ACCEPTABLE REASONS FOR MILESTONE EXTENSIONS

Recommendation 3: That ‘lack of supervision’ be accepted as a bona fide reason in support of an application for an extension to a milestone

I acknowledge the MPA’s concerns about students feeling vulnerable if their supervisory arrangements change and they are left without adequate supervision. Note that the University maintains a formal responsibility under its *Code of Practice* to address supervisory issues as they arise within a prescribed timeframe. Section 5.2.2.2 of the Code explicitly states, for example, that “When a supervisor is no longer authorised or is unable to continue in the role, the head of the academic unit formally advises the student within 10 working days and initiates procedures to identify and appoint a suitable replacement in consultation with the student.”¹⁶ If the University does not take this responsibility seriously, then the student always has the right of redress, and would be within their right to argue that “mitigating circumstances” apply in relation to their circumstances. I would add that the Milestone Review Panel plays an important role in considering supervisory arrangements as part of its assessment of the student’s progress, noting that this is in part why the membership of the Milestone Review Panel is now independent and does not include the student’s supervisors.

¹⁴ See National Code Part D, Standard 10; <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/Regulatory-Information/Education-Services-for-Overseas-Students-ESOS-Legislative-Framework/National-Code/nationalcodepartd/Pages/ExplanatoryguideD10.aspx>; accessed 17 July 2015.

¹⁵ See Graduate Research Progress Management Procedures, available from <http://policy.monash.edu.au/policy-bank/academic/research/mrgs/grad-research-progress-management-procedures.html>; accessed 15 July 2015.

¹⁶ See *Code of practice for supervision of doctoral and research master’s students*; available from <http://www.monash.edu.au/migr/research-degrees/handbook/chapter-five/5-2.html>; accessed 20 July 2015.

Finally, I note too that the Graduate Research Coordinator / Program Director in the student's academic unit/program is also entrusted to intervene where student welfare matters arise, including disputes or difficulties between student and supervisors. In 2014, the University sought to strengthen this role and capacity via the development of a new Graduate Research Coordinator PD to ensure that the University better supports its students through the research journey.

Recommendation 4: That serious sickness be accepted as a bona fide reason in support of an application for an extension to a milestone

It is not accurate to say that sickness is not accepted as a bona fide reason in support of an application for an extension to a milestone. If a student has a pending milestone, applies for sick or any other leave and this is *approved*, then the student's milestone date is in fact automatically updated. This has always been the case, and is therefore not a change to practice.

Recommendation 5: That for HDRs enrolled through Malaysia campus only, employment be accepted as a bona fide reason in support of an application for an extension to a milestone

I appreciate both MPA and MUPA's role in continuing to raise issues with GRC regarding the employment of students who are on scholarships and enrolled through Monash Malaysia. I would like to emphasise my ongoing commitment to work with students and the campus to address any issues as they arise. However, such issues are best dealt with systemically rather than on the level of the individual, but we encourage any students who are experiencing difficulties in balancing work and study commitments to contact their Graduate Research Coordinator or Head of Department to seek resolution in the first instance.

Recommendation 6: That all applications for extensions to milestones are decided on a case-by-case basis, with all matters beyond the student's control taken into consideration.

All applications for a milestone extension are in fact already considered on a case-by-case basis.

Under the previous *Confirmation and Non-Confirmation Procedures*, students were only entitled to apply for a pre-Confirmation extension "where delays beyond the candidate's control have occurred in the research project..."¹⁷ Under the new procedures, students can apply for an extension to a Confirmation, Progress Review or Final Review milestone "where research has been delayed by circumstances beyond the student's control - e.g. equipment breakdown; delays due to ethics approval, etc."¹⁸ It is correct that under the new procedures, lack of supervisory availability is not a ground for extending a milestone. This change has been implemented to ensure that supervisors understand that they are also accountable in appropriately supporting students to meet the requirements of a milestone in a timely way.

¹⁷ See paragraph 1.2, *Candidature Progress Management - Confirmation & Non-Confirmation Procedures*; available from <http://policy.monash.edu.au/policy-bank/academic/research/mrgs/non-confirmation-of-candidature-procedures.html>; accessed 20 July 2015.

¹⁸ See paragraph 23, *Graduate Research Progress Management Procedures*; available from <http://policy.monash.edu.au/policy-bank/academic/research/mrgs/grad-research-progress-management-procedures.html>; accessed 20 July 2015.

The overarching policy states that supervisory staff are responsible for:

- a. ensuring that students are aware of the requirements of each milestone, and have been provided with sufficient and appropriate written feedback in a timely way prior to the milestone date;
- b. giving serious consideration to a student's progress as determined by the procedures by acknowledging the importance and mandatory nature of the milestone review framework...¹⁹

It is reasonable and necessary for the University to seek such accountability from supervisors.

If a student's employment is interfering with their progress, then they should be initiating the appropriate action, such as applying either for a period of leave or transferring to part-time enrolment. Students are subject to the regulations of the University which require them to devote sufficient time to undertake their research. If they are unable to do so, then they need to speak to their supervisors, Graduate Research Coordinator or Head of Department to consider what options are available to them, acknowledging of course that some limits apply to international students under ESOS requirements.

If a student presents for a milestone and is deemed not to have made satisfactory progress, then they are, as noted above, entitled to an additional period in order to meet the requirements of that milestone. This is already considered on a case-by-case basis: the procedures require the Milestone Review Panel to outline the "tasks required to meet progress requirements along with a timeframe for completion of those tasks which is realistic and which takes into account the student's mode of enrolment (i.e. full-time or part-time)."²⁰ As also noted above, the Milestone Review Panel is asked to consider whether "mitigating circumstances may apply."²¹

BACKDATING APPLICATIONS FOR SICK LEAVE AND INTERMISSION

Recommendation 7: That applications for sick leave and intermission are able to be backdated for up to three weeks.

The University introduced the policy of no backdating of all enrolment variations, not just sick leave and intermission, on 1 December 2013. This was comprehensively communicated directly to staff and students. As part of the communication sent to students on 15 November 2013, the advice was that "Backdating a variation to candidature application is no longer permitted and will not be approved." In addition, this communication emphasised that:

It is now your responsibility, as the student, to ensure relevant documents are forwarded to the MIGR Office, prior to the date when the proposed change/s take effect. Where this is not possible, (facing illness or exceptional personal circumstances), your academic unit (either through your main supervisor or

¹⁹ See *Graduate Research Progress Management Policy*; available from <http://policy.monash.edu.au/policy-bank/academic/research/mrgs/grad-research-progress-mgmt-policy.html>; accessed 20 July 2015.

²⁰ See paragraph 62, *Graduate Research Progress Management Procedures*; available from <http://policy.monash.edu.au/policy-bank/academic/research/mrgs/grad-research-progress-management-procedures.html>; accessed 20 July 2015.

²¹ See paragraph 27, *Guidelines for Chairs of Milestone Review Panel and Academic Progress Review Panels*; available from <http://policy.monash.edu.au/policy-bank/academic/research/mrgs/guidelines-milestone-review-panel-and-apr-panels.html>; accessed 20 July 2015.

Postgraduate Coordinator/Program Director) must notify the MIGR Office within 10 working days of the your circumstances to ensure appropriate support is provided and action is taken.

Therefore, this is not a new policy, but one that has in fact been in operation now for more than 18 months.

In introducing this policy, the University was conscious of the need to allow for a discretionary period of 10 working days for sick leave notifications to be sent to MIGR where circumstances prevented the student from doing so themselves. The policy therefore already provides some flexibility.

The University made this policy change for the following reasons:

- The University has a legal obligation “to create and manage records which support the university’s operational and administrative responsibilities and enable compliance with external demands such as audits and Freedom of Information (FOI) requests.”²²

The Monash University *Recordkeeping Policy* states the following in relation to this:

As the "officer in charge of a public office", the Vice-Chancellor is responsible for ensuring that the University complies with legislative requirements for recordkeeping.

All managers and supervisors are responsible for monitoring staff under their supervision to ensure that they understand and comply with records management policies and procedures. Managers and supervisors are also responsible for fostering and supporting a culture within their workgroup that promotes good recordkeeping practices.²³

- Widespread backdating of enrolment variations is poor record-keeping and a breach of the University’s obligations under its own record-keeping policy, noting that backdating is a form of direct interference with, and altering of, the student record. Therefore, from a compliance perspective, the recommendation that the University provide students with greater flexibility on when they submit a variation to MIGR can not be accepted.
- The University has specific obligations to correctly report on student enrolments via its Higher Education Student Reporting.²⁴ If the University needs to revise and vary its reporting, it must do so under a Revision Submission. There are only limited reasons for varying a reported enrolment. Administrative error on the part of the University is a legitimate reason for varying a report, but failure on the part of the student to submit a variation on time is not a legitimate reason. Therefore, external constraints apply here, to which the University has clear responsibilities to adhere.

²² <http://www.adm.monash.edu.au/records-archives/records/whatisarecords.html>; accessed 20 July 2015.

²³ See <http://www.policy.monash.edu/policy-bank/management/its/recordkeeping-policy.html>; accessed 20 July 2015.

²⁴ See http://heimshelp.education.gov.au/sites/heimshelp/2015_data_requirements/2015higheredstudent/scope/pages/scope-2015#nav; accessed 20 July 2015.

END OF CANDIDATURE

See Recommendation 1.

Recommendation 8: That extensions to candidature be granted where students have the support of their supervisors, reasonable progress can be demonstrated and an estimated completion date is submitted.

As noted above, the approach to approving (or not approving) thesis submission date extension requests has at times been too literal. We are actively seeking to work on protocols to ensure that the application of this policy at the departmental level is nuanced to the specific circumstances of the student.

Recommendation 9: That candidature extensions be of an appropriate length to reflect the estimated completion date.

The previous policy never allowed for students to apply for an unlimited period of extensions. It is not clear how such a policy change would benefit students who are often completing their research during an unfunded period. Reasonable circumstances are, and should be, taken into account when it comes to extending enrolment.

MINIMUM THREE MONTH RE-ENROLMENT

See recommendation 1.

Recommendation 10: That there should not be a minimum period of re-enrolment applied to postgraduates who are returning after having been discontinued in good standing.

The University's preference is for a student to remain enrolled rather than be discontinued in good standing if they can illustrate that they have experienced research-related delays beyond their control *and* they are actively progressing towards completion. Such cases will be dealt with on an individual basis, with academic and professional staff at MIGR developing clearer internal protocols in relation to this to ensure that we get the right balance of common sense and accountability.

However, a student is normally only discontinued in good standing after they have exhausted all extension entitlements *and* have failed to deliver a thesis submission. That is, they have been granted an extensions/s on the basis of an agreed timeline for thesis submission, yet have not proceeded to submit that thesis. It is not unreasonable on the part of the University to insist that such students make a case for being re-admitted and undertake a minimum period of enrolment and a Final Review. By being re-admitted, the student can have confidence that the University is prepared to formally support them and provide the necessary resources for them to complete their thesis. This is particularly important for students who enrolled at a time when the University did not require them to undertake any progress milestone review other than confirmation. It is not unreasonable for the University to insist on some quality control in such cases. The University needs to be confident that any thesis sent out for examination under the auspices of Monash University is *prima facie* ready for examination.

It is also important to emphasise that these procedural changes ensure that Monash University academic staff who are supervising former students discontinued in good standing are appropriately recognised for their time and commitment. Re-admitting such students for a period of time supports this proposition, and also provides some certainty to the student where there is an adverse examination outcome, as the University must maintain its commitment to support and supervise the student.

I conclude here by emphasising that the University has sought to be fair and reasonable in relation to former students whose enrolment lapsed in either 2013 or 2014 - on the basis that a submission of a thesis is more likely within the first two years of enrolment lapsing, and also in recognition that such former students are better able to meet currency and relevance criteria in relation to the research underpinning their thesis. The policy allows for such students to proceed to make a case for submitting their thesis without first having undergone a minimum period of re-admission.

Recommendation 11: That where postgraduates are required to reenrol for three months to submit an already completed thesis, no Student Services Amenities Fee (SSAF) be applied.

I note that this recommendation has been referred to the University Chief Operating Officer.

COURSEWORK COMPONENT

Recommendation 12: That faculties review all coursework units in relation to their relevance to research programs and benefit to HDR students

I agree with the recommendation that faculties review all coursework units either as part of the regular University coursework unit accreditation cycle, or where evidence collated on an annual basis indicates that disestablishment or significant reconfiguration of the unit may be required. This is in accordance with Monash University's *Program Review Policy*.²⁵

Student concerns raised directly with MIGR about the quality of a coursework unit have been referred by me to the relevant Associate Dean (Graduate Research) for further investigation. To date, the number of concerns raised by students and received by me in 2015 have been low in number (two cases in total). It is critical that any coursework which forms a part of a graduate research program be relevant and pedagogically sound. I am happy to receive any further specific concerns the student body may have in this regard.

Recommendation 13: That candidature be automatically extended to accommodate the length of time lost to compulsory coursework units

A number of faculties have chosen the option of coursework for their students, providing them with the opportunity to focus on developing knowledge and expertise in their chosen discipline, as well as developing professional skills that will support their career ambitions.

Students undertaking coursework units are not required to undertake any other development activities as part of the Monash Doctoral Program.

While students' PhD research projects are to be conceived from the outset as achievable within 3 years equivalent full-time, students continue to have access to a maximum period of enrolment of four years of full-time or eight-years part-time enrolment.

²⁵ <http://www.policy.monash.edu/policy-bank/academic/research/mrgs/program-review-policy.html>; accessed 20 July 2015.

As noted already, where enrolment has been delayed by factors outside of the control of the student (e.g. equipment breakdown, delays in ethical approval of research, etc.) and there is clear evidence that the student is committed and actively progressing towards completion, an extension may be approved.

RESEARCH TRAINING SKILLS

See Recommendation 1.

Recommendation 14: That faculties and MIGR review all training skills units on offer to ensure quality and relevance

Recommendation 15: That MIGR review the offer of a PhD model that requires the compulsory inclusion of 120 hours of training skills

I agree with the recommendation that faculties and MIGR review all professional development training activities to ensure quality and relevance.

All activities offered as part of the Graduate Researcher Development (GRD) stream are evaluated to determine their design, impact and capacity to enhance student skills and capabilities.

A full review of the design and delivery of the Graduate Research Professional Development (GRPD) program is planned for 2017 (3 year cycle review).

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Research training remains the core of the Monash Doctoral Program. However, it is now widely acknowledged that doctoral students must prepare themselves for their future career during enrolment, in addition to completing their research thesis.

A student's capacity to take the next step in either their academic career or in an alternative non-academic career is greatly enhanced if their skill base is broadened to match the needs of the employment sector.

While research training provides guidance on the research process, students require opportunities to develop their self-management, leadership, communication and interpersonal skills. The Monash Doctoral Program is designed to provide students with opportunities to be engaged through a range of learning experiences either through coursework, professional development training (GRPD), or through interdisciplinary and industry engagement (Graduate Interdisciplinary Research Program - GRIP).

I am focused on developing and improving our programs to ensure that a wide range of opportunities are available to enhance graduate research learning. We do want our students to be confident that the time they invest in broadening and developing their skills and capabilities, is productive. We also would like to support our students to integrate their learning into their research practices.

The overall goal is to create opportunities for students to both experience research success and develop their professional skills, such that they can confidently make their way through a highly competitive and often changing workplace.