

Academic Registrar's Group

## Higher Degree by Research Student Complaints Guide

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### 1. Introduction

Complaints from Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students can often be quite complex. We hope this guide will assist students to:

- resolve any issues or problems they encounter at the earliest opportunity (avoiding the formal complaint process where possible)
- in the event, that it does become necessary to lodge a formal complaint, lodge the complaint in a simplified manner with the right information so that the investigation of your complaint can commence promptly.

Just as in any workplace, issues and problems can arise in the day-to-day context in which research students work. For example, you may disagree with a decision made relating to your candidature, you might be experiencing difficulties relating to resourcing or infrastructure, or you might be having problems dealing with interpersonal relationships. These types of matters can be addressed informally and/or formally.

### 2. An Informal Resolution – often the quickest way to resolve a problem

The quickest and most effective way to achieve a resolution when you encounter problems or difficulties is to try and resolve the issue promptly and where possible with the person or area that is involved with the issue. We call this an informal resolution. In the first instance, we recommend discussing the issue with your Supervisor/s. Alternatively, each School has an HDR Delegated Authority who is responsible for the HDR program and can intervene in matters where necessary. In addition, Candidates (and Supervisors) can also raise matters with the Research Training Services team in each College.

Further information is available on RMIT's [Research students](#) webpages. Contact details can be found under 'Resources and support'.

It is strongly recommended that, where possible, students raise issues informally as early as possible. Although it might seem easier to ignore problems in the hope that they will resolve themselves, addressing the problem early through an informal process is often an effective way to avoid problems escalating later.

If you feel it isn't appropriate to try and resolve your issue informally, for example, if you don't feel comfortable contacting staff in your School, you may lodge a formal complaint.

### 3. A Formal Complaint – if your problem is not resolved informally

If you remain dissatisfied after trying to resolve your issue informally, or if you feel it isn't appropriate to try and resolve your issue informally, you are entitled to lodge a formal complaint with the Student Complaints team. This should be lodged in writing as soon as possible after the issues arise and an informal resolution has been attempted; or immediately afterwards if you do not feel an informal resolution is appropriate.

Please see the [Student Complaint](#) webpage for general information and an overview of the student complaints process. There is also a link to [submit a complaint](#).

The Student and Student-Related Complaints [Policy](#) and [Procedure](#) provide further detailed information about the student complaints process.

## 4. Steps to take before you lodge a formal complaint

We recognise that HDR complaints can be complex and may involve numerous individuals or issues. We also acknowledge that the process of lodging a formal complaint may feel overwhelming as there may be a significant amount of supporting information and evidence relevant to the issues. To assist you with this process, we make the following suggestions:

- **RUSU can provide help, support and advocacy with a student complaint**

The [RMIT University Student Union \(RUSU\)](#) offers a [Student Rights Service](#) that employs specialist HDR Student Rights Officers who can give you advice about the options available to you and can assist you to resolve any issues you encounter both informally, and if necessary, formally. Please contact RUSU or visit their webpages for further information. Please also be aware that you can reach out to [RMIT's Support Services](#) if you require any other help or assistance. We strongly advise that you seek advice prior to lodging a formal complaint.

- **Provide a summary document and timeline with your complaint submission.**

You do not need to submit all of your information and evidence in one attempt. Complaints containing a significant amount of supporting documentation and information can often make identifying the key issues difficult. We recommend you submit a summary document that outlines the key issues in your complaint. For each issue, provide clear information describing:

- the issue: explain how you have been/are being affected, provide any relevant policy or process that you think is being breached (if known) and explain what your desired outcome is
- a clear timeline of events related to the issues in your complaint. Include the full names of any relevant staff members, students or witnesses involved.

These documents can be brief.

The Student Complaints Case Manager will contact you to discuss your complaint in more detail and will explain what further information and evidence you should submit. This will ensure your Case Manager fully understands the key issues in your complaint and ensures relevant information and evidence is received and considered in a structured manner.

- **Be patient**

Investigating formal HDR complaints is generally not a quick process. It can take some time for a Case Manager to assess the information in a complaint, collect further information and evidence from other parts of the University and conduct interviews where necessary. Although you may experience a delay in receiving an outcome, your Case Manager will endeavour to resolve the matter as quickly and efficiently as possible and will provide you with regular updates during the investigation.

- **Anonymity**

Although students have the right to remain anonymous, investigating anonymous complaints is extremely challenging as the Case Manager will often need to withhold important information during the investigation to protect your identity. This can inhibit an investigation and make it difficult to resolve a complaint. This is something to keep in mind.

For further information on the student complaints process, please see the:

[RMIT Student Complaints webpage](#)