

Responding to Academic Staff Member Requests for Alternative Supervisors

The purpose of this information sheet is to provide University managers with a better understanding of their obligations to properly consider an academic staff member's request for an alternative supervisor under the [University of Adelaide's Enterprise Agreement](#) (the 'Enterprise Agreement').

Discussion

A staff member's supervisor is the person nominated by the University who is responsible for their day-to-day supervision. An academic staff member's supervisor is generally their Head of School. Whilst remaining accountable, the Head of School may delegate some supervisory functions to the staff member's Head of Discipline or Head of Department.

Pursuant to clause 2.7.5 of the Enterprise Agreement (Academic Staff Supervision), an academic staff member may request the nomination of an alternative supervisor, except in circumstances where activity relating to the provisions in Clause 8 (Working Effectively) of the Enterprise Agreement has commenced.

Clause 8 incorporates both formal and informal processes for managing unsatisfactory performance, disciplinary procedures for misconduct and serious misconduct, internal review of decisions, staff grievances and dispute settlement procedures.

Before approving a staff member's request for an alternative supervisor, the University prefers, in principle, to consider all reasonable options to maintain the supervisory relationship between a staff member and their current supervisor. Wherever possible, the University will provide support to achieve this outcome.

The University has the right to determine the supervisor

As an employer, the University has the right as a matter of managerial prerogative to control the parameters of the employment relationship with its staff. A key aspect of this is choosing appropriate supervisors for staff members.

What process should a staff member follow to request an alternative supervisor?

A staff member should speak to their Executive Dean. The Executive Dean should ask the staff member to submit their request in writing setting out their reasons and providing any supporting documentation.

The Executive Dean should discuss the request with the staff member and their Head of School / current supervisor (where appropriate) before making a decision.

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What is the University's obligation to grant a staff member's request for an alternative supervisor?

Clause 2.7.5 (*Academic Staff Supervision*) gives the University discretion to accept or reject a staff member's request for an alternative supervisor.

The University should treat a staff member's request for an alternative supervisor as confidential and give it due consideration; assessing whether it is appropriate to assign an alternative supervisor based on the circumstances of and reasons for the request.

If the request is granted, the nominated supervisor should be given appropriate training in *University of Adelaide* staff supervision and assessment methods.

When is it reasonable for a staff member to be given an alternative supervisor?

Whether a staff member's request is reasonable will depend on the circumstances of a given case. Circumstances where it may be appropriate to nominate an alternative supervisor include (for example):

- where the staff member can demonstrate that their relationship with their supervisor is unworkable; or
- where the supervisor is not able to effectively supervise the work because they do not have sufficient or appropriate experience in the broad areas of expertise of the staff member.

In some cases of demonstrated incompatibility between the staff member and their supervisor, and following consultation with the supervisor, it may be appropriate for the University to arrange for a temporary alternative supervisor while mediation is conducted.

Through mediation, the University may reach an arrangement to facilitate a reporting line which addresses the staff member's concerns. The University may consider internal mediation (with the relevant Executive Dean) or, where appropriate, external mediation.

When is it reasonable for the University to reject a staff member's request for an alternative supervisor?

In general, the suitable alternative supervisor for a staff member will be their Executive Dean or a senior member of the academic staff within their Area. It is not usually appropriate to assign a supervisor to a staff member who is located in a different Area of the University who would not be competent in the staff member's broad areas of expertise. This is to maintain relevance for the supervisor in understanding the subject matter of the staff member's area of work, in allocating workload to them and in conducting their Planning, Development and Review meetings.

What should the University do to implement a decision that has been made?

Once a staff member's Executive Dean has considered a request for an alternative supervisor and made a decision, they will notify the staff member of their decision in writing,

If the Executive Dean decides it is reasonable to reject the staff member's request, they will provide the staff member with their reason(s) for refusal. The Executive Dean should consider providing ongoing support to both parties, as appropriate, to monitor the situation through the arrangement of scheduled one-on-one and where appropriate, group meetings.

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If the staff member's request for an alternative supervisor is approved, a trial period of, for example, 6 months, is recommended giving the opportunity to monitor and review how the new arrangement between the staff member and alternative supervisor is functioning.

How is the alternative supervisor arrangement recorded?

When the Executive Dean has confirmed the reporting arrangements in writing with the staff member, the current and alternative supervisor, they should forward an email to HR Service Centre (hrservice.centre@adelaide.edu.au) with the letter of confirmation and request that the new supervisor arrangements be updated in the system.

The HR Service Centre will record the Executive Dean's letter of confirmation on the staff member's file. This will ensure that all reporting requirements, including leave requests, for the staff member are directed to the alternative supervisor.

Further enquiries

For further information, please contact the HR Service Centre 831 31111 or via email [HR Service Centre](#).

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